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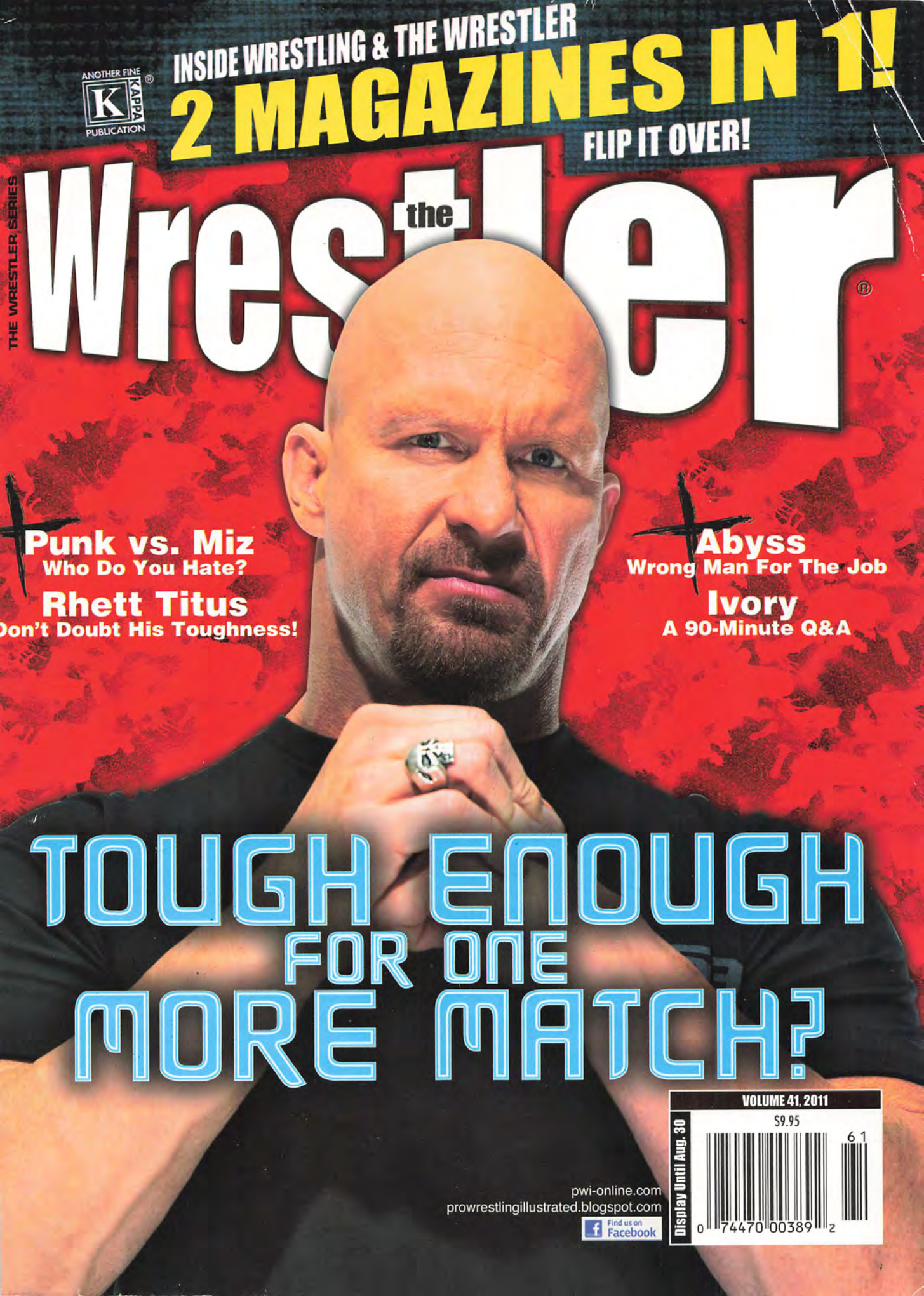

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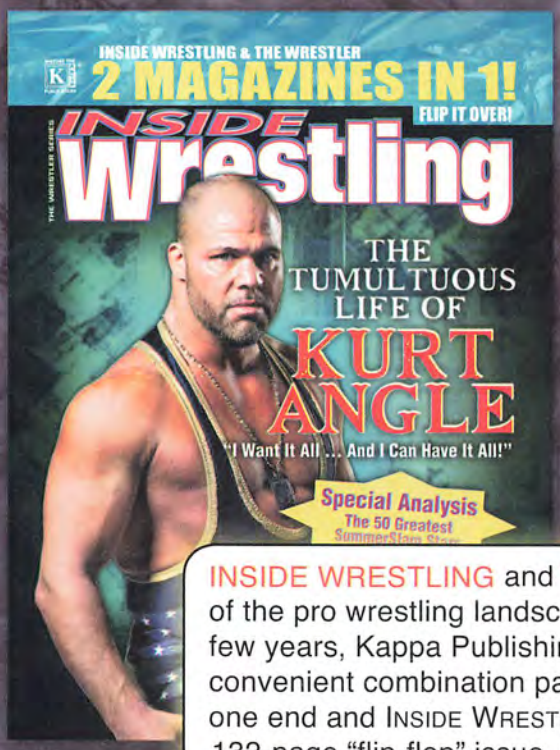
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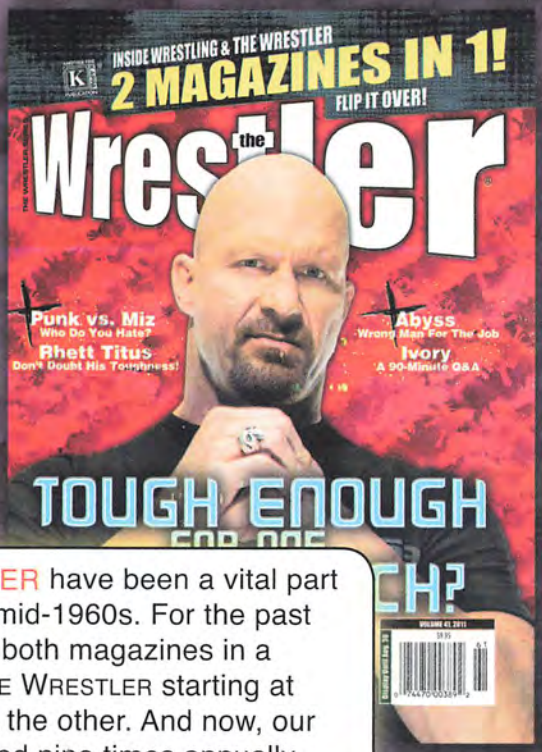

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VOLUME 41, 2011

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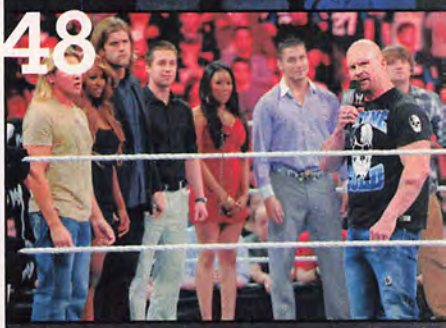

YOUR LETTERS

NOT IMPRESSED

Can we all just take a deep breath and chill out over Christian, please? He's a glorified mid-carder at best, and there was a reason WWE let him walk to TNA a few years ago.

Everybody was so upset when Randy Orton took his title, but there is a reason for that, too: Orton is great; Christian is mediocre. There's no shame in being mediocre if that's what you are. And that is certainly what Christian is.

FREDDIE FAULK
Trenton, NJ

THE WAIT CONTINUES ...

I was deeply disappointed to hear that Kharma will be out of action because of a high-risk pregnancy. I'm glad she's fulfilling the dream of having a child, and I hope the pregnancy goes well for her and her baby. But I was really excited about watching her wrestle in WWE. It seemed like it took forever for her to make her way to WWE, and now that she got there, we have to wait another nine months at least before she can make an impact in the ring.

KIRSTEN LAWSON
Dallas, TX

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Kharma made her presence felt in WWE right away, but now she'll be out of action for a while. Reader Kirsten Lawson is disappointed that she must wait even longer to see Kharma ply her trade in WWE.

FAN VS. TRUTH?

I just watched R-Truth throw a drink in some fan's face on *Raw*. Only a punk would try to embarrass a person in front of his children like that. I hope somebody makes him pay for that.

D'ANDRE EVANS
Chester, PA

MORE RVD!

After watching *Impact Wrestling* tonight, I have to say that I was totally blown away by how little TNA uses Rob Van Dam. RVD is still one of the most exciting and interesting wrestlers in the business. No, he isn't a champion, but RVD and AJ Styles should be all over TNA's weekly show. They can wrestle rings around everybody else on the roster, and the action picks up the second they enter the ring.

I'm not saying I'm going to boycott *Impact Wrestling* until they start featuring more RVD, but I can say that *Impact Wrestling* will never be as compelling as it can be until TNA does.

REESE CLOUD
Washington, D.C.

SHOW SOME APPRECIATION

For the life of me, I can't figure out why John Cena draws so many boos. Yes, he has a limited repertoire of moves, but so did Hulk Hogan and Steve Austin, and they were universally loved. Cena does what he needs to do to win. What is so wrong about that? Besides, Cena makes a fine champ and a good representative for WWE. I guess Cena will just have to become Daniel Bryan or Kurt Angle before wrestling fans appreciate him.

MARY KOLARIK
Chicago, IL

A BRIGHT IDEA

One idea that would benefit all wrestling companies, no matter how big or small, is the best-of series between two evenly matched wrestlers. Just imagine how intense and entertaining a series of five matches between Kofi Kingston and Dolph Ziggler would be, whether the Intercontinental title was on the line or not. Instead, we have to tune in to *Raw* and keep our fingers crossed that these two great young talents will be put in a match against each other.

GARY RACHUBAUSKUS
Scranton, PA

MORE THAN A MEATHEAD

Thanks to Harry Burkett for an informative and entertaining interview with Tommy Dreamer ("Q&A," Volume 40, 2011).

WHAT'S HAPPENING

BY DAN MURPHY

IN A MOVE that could have sweeping effects for the third largest wrestling promotion in the United States, Sinclair Broadcasting Group has announced it has purchased Ring of Honor.

On May 23, the multi-media giant announced it had acquired the promotion that helped start the careers of **CM Punk**, **Samoa Joe**, and **Daniel Bryan**. According to a news release issued by Sinclair, the company "owns and operates, programs or provides sales service to 58 television stations in 35 markets," reaching approximately 22 percent of television households in the U.S.

A new Ring of Honor television program will debut on Sinclair's broadcast television network in September. Sinclair will also air ROH programming online on its website.

"We are very excited about this acquisition," said **Steve Marks**, COO of Sinclair's Television Group. "We believe that the powerful promotional platform that our TV stations provide, coupled with our 22 percent coverage of the U.S. TV households, will allow ROH to achieve name brand recognition and grow its share of the wrestling market. When you consider the make-up of our station mix and the number of CW, MTV, and Fox affiliates we operate, this is a perfect fit for our viewer demographics."

Former ROH owner **Cary Silkin** said the deal will draw more fans to the ROH product.

"We have been waiting and working for this opportunity for quite some time now," Silkin said. "Of our nine years in the business, there has been no better roster of wrestlers than this one to expose the ROH product to the masses. With Sinclair's resources and many avenues of distribution, we believe many new fans will be as captivated as those who have followed Ring of Honor over the years."

Under Sinclair, Joe Koff will serve as chief operating officer and head ROH. Koff has prior experience in producing and marketing pro wrestling programming. Silkin will remain with the company in an advisory capacity while **Jim Cornette** was named vice president of creative and **Gary Juster** vice president of operations.

With Sinclair's resources, it is possible that ROH could greatly expand its fan base, bolstering its pay-per-view revenues and event attendance. Hopefully, ROH can avoid the political headaches that wracked ECW when that promotion finally received its long-sought-after national television deal on TNN. Unlike the ECW failure, however, the network has ownership of ROH and has a vested interest in the promotion's success.

The recent return of **Chris Harris** to TNA has more than a few people wondering about the fate of **Bobby Roode**.

Harris and **James Storm**, Roode's current tag team partner in Beer Money Inc., had competed as the popular America's Most Wanted in TNA for many months before Roode and

Photo by Scott Finkelstein

Former Ring of Honor owner Cary Silkin has a lot to be clapping about. With the sale of ROH to Sinclair Broadcasting Group, the promotion will receive extensive exposure and financing. Silkin will stay with ROH in an advisor's role.

SEND LETTERS TO: **YOUR LETTERS**
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Burkett's interview proves that Dreamer is more than a jacked-up meathead that just likes to swing chairs and throw trashcans at other wrestlers. He's thoughtful and articulate, and I wouldn't be surprised to see him running his own major wrestling organization someday.

Great work, guys. Keep these awesome interviews coming!

SAMMIE FUNK
Hendersonville, TN

INVISIBLE ERIC

Why does your magazine continually ignore Eric Young? He is an excellent wrestler who has won a major title—the TNA TV title—yet your publication writes nothing about him or his accomplishments. I can only wonder if the fact that he's Canadian has something to do with it.

DAVID SHANDERSON
Toronto, ON

WE'RE TUNED IN

It was nice to see the NWA get some coverage in your last issue ("Talking Out Of School: The Shocking Origins Of The Cabana-Pearce Feud," Volume 40).

With WWE and TNA dominating the wrestling industry, it is easy to forget about smaller groups such as the NWA. Thankfully, you guys were tuned in to the Cabana-Pearce feud all along, and did a wonderful job of explaining how it all started. I was quite surprised to read about its origins.

EARL GARY
Plymouth, OH

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA TV champion and Canadian native Eric Young flashes a thumb-up to fans in the Impact Zone. Reader David Shanderson would like to see more of Young in our magazine. This shot's for you, David.

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P.O. Box 433120
Palm Coast, FL 32143-3120
386-246-0114
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THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING (ISSN: 1052-0899), Vol. 25, No. 5, 2011, is published nine times anually by Kappa Publishing Group, Inc., 6198 Butler Pike, Suite 200, Blue Bell, PA 19422. Periodicals postage paid at Blue Bell, PA 19422, and additional post offices. Postmaster: Send change of address notices to: THE WRESTLER/INSIDE WRESTLING, P.O. Box 433120, Palm Coast, FL 32143. Single copy price $9.95 U.S. and Canada (£5.95 in U.K.). Annual subscription price $89.55 in the U.S., $112.05 in Canada and Mexico, and $157.05 in other countries. Not responsible for the loss or non-return of unsolicited articles or photographs, which will not be returned unless accompanied by a self-addressed envelope bearing the proper amount of postage. The entire contents of this magazine are copyright ©2011 Kappa Publishing Group, Inc. No part of this magazine may be reproduced without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved. All WWE trademarks, logos and copyrights are the exclusive property of WWE and its subsidiaries. All other trademarks, logos and copyrights are the property of their respective owners. ©2011 WWE, Inc. Publisher is not responsible for the accuracy or content of any advertisements appearing in this magazine, nor the delivery or quality of merchandise or services offered. No endorsement of any such advertisement is intended or implied. Advertisers and agencies assume liability for claims arising from the content of their advertisements. FOR ADVERTISING INQUIRIES AND RATES: (215) 461-0583. U.S. and Canadian distribution by Kable Distribution Services Inc., 14 Wall Street, Suite 4C, New York, NY 10022. International distribution by Worldwide Media Service Inc., 115 East 23rd St., New York, NY 10010, U.K. distribution by Comag, Tavistock Rd., West Drayton, Middlesex UB77QE, England.
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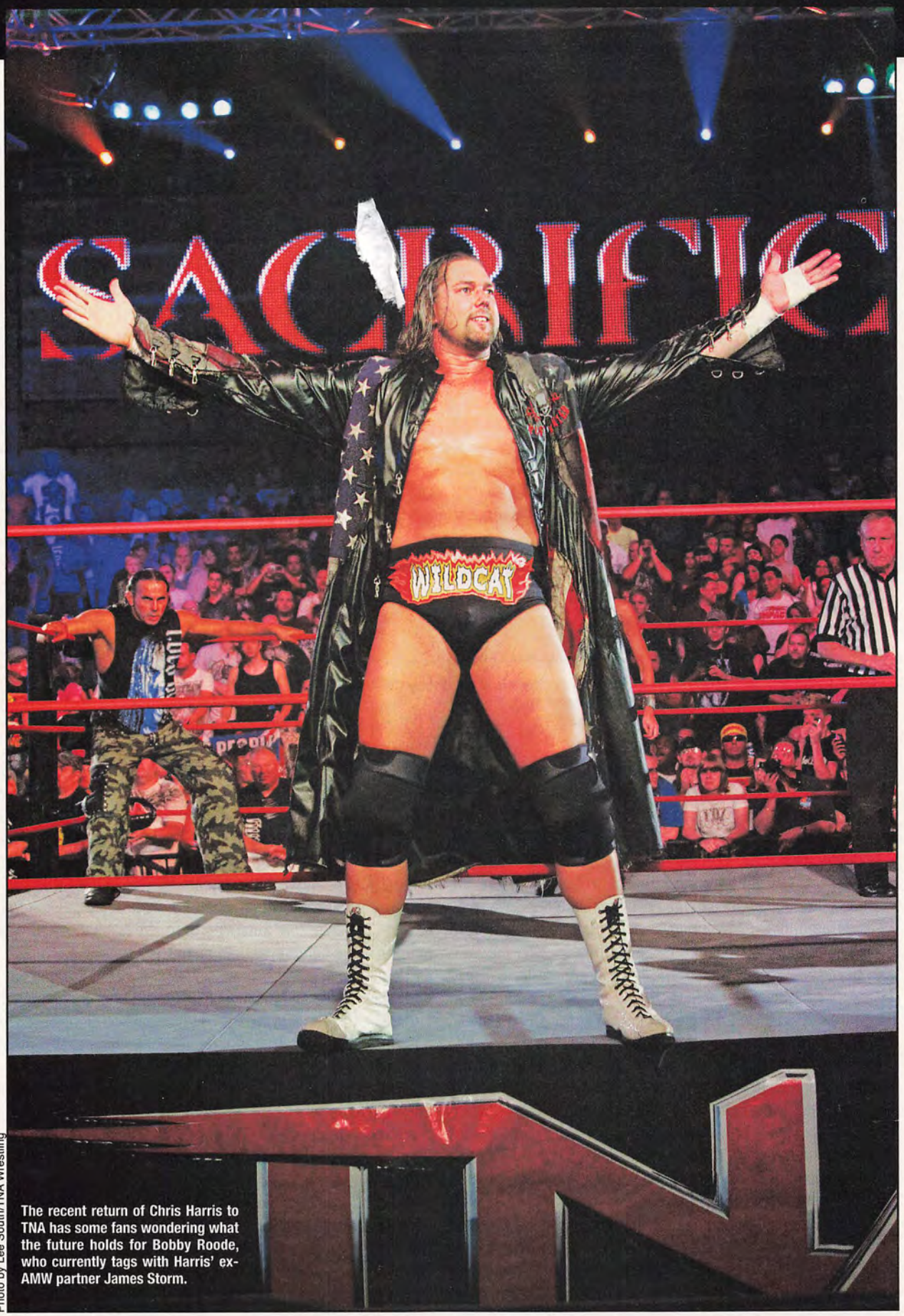

The recent return of Chris Harris to TNA has some fans wondering what the future holds for Bobby Roode, who currently tags with Harris' ex-AMW partner James Storm.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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Alberto Del Rio won't be laughing when The Big Show attempts to get revenge for being run over with Del Rio's car after a recent backstage confrontation on *Raw*.

Storm formed their own team.

Even though Roode and Storm currently hold the TNA World tag team title, some find it curious that Harris' return comes at a time when Roode has been appearing more frequently in singles matches.

Harris was quick to downplay the idea that he's there to disrupt the tag champs, and he emphatically rejects the notion that Roode needs to look over his shoulder. "We're all in a different place now," Harris said. "I got no ill will toward Bobby and no plans to join up with James."

The Big Show is recovering from injuries after **Alberto Del Rio's** personal valet **Ricardo Rodriguez** ran him down with Del Rio's car following a backstage skirmish on *Raw*.

Rodriguez had approached The Big Show and **Kane** following a match, and the altercation ended with Show leaving Rodriguez unconscious on the floor.

Near the end of the show, Kane heard screams while walking backstage and discovered his tag team partner lying beneath Del Rio's car in tremendous pain.

The extent of Show's injuries and the amount of time he's expected to miss are unknown as of press time. Del Rio issued a ham-fisted apology for the "accident" on *Raw* the following week. However, The Big Show has vowed to get revenge when he is physically capable. "It's one thing to take cheap shots in the ring," Show explained. "But you start messing around with cars backstage, and somebody can get killed. I'll be patient, and strike Del Rio when he least suspects it."

This is the second time in his WWE career that The Big Show has been a victim of vehicular assault. Back in 1999, **The Bossman** ran down Show at a funeral while Show was eulogizing his deceased father. Bossman then hitched Show's father's casket to his car and hauled the coffin around the graveyard.

Apparently, Show's tremendous size allows some opponents to feel justified in attacking him with a motor vehicle.

In other news, wrestling fans in New York, New Jersey, and Philadelphia got a taste of the Orient when New Japan Pro Wrestling completed a three-show tour of the Northeast. The "East Coast Invasion" featured some of New Japan's top stars, including IWGP champion **Hiroshi Tanahashi**, **Prince Devitt**, **Jushin Liger**, and **Togi Makabe**, as well as U.S. stars **Low-Ki**, **Rhino**, and **Davey Richards**. The big story to come out of the three-day tour was the crowning of the first New Japan Intercontinental champion, as **MVP** defeated **Toru Yano** to win the title tournament finals on May 15 at the former ECW Arena.

Hulk Hogan made a rare independent appearance in Brantford, Ontario, on May 14, appearing on a card presented by Championship Wrestling International. "The Hulkster" was joined by several of his old friends, including **Ted DiBiase**, **The Nasty Boys**, **Brutus Beefcake**, and **Kevin Nash**. Though Hogan doesn't hear many cheers in The Impact Zone, he received a rousing ovation when he made his presence felt, saving Beefcake from a beating from The Nasty Boys. Hogan and Beefcake celebrated with an old-fashioned pose-down.

Hogan's pal, **Eric Bischoff**, has announced a new endeavor of his own. Bischoff is launching a craft beer brand named Eric Bischoff Family Brewing. The first beer to be brewed will be Buffalo Bill Cody Beer, named after the most famous resident of Cody, Wyoming, the town Bischoff calls home.

TNA crowned the most unlikely champion in the history of the X division when **Abyss** defeated **Kazarian** to win the championship on the May 19 edition of *Impact Wrestling* *(see story on page 54)*. Abyss, who has begun quoting *The Art Of War* by Sun Tzu in recent weeks, which is a far cry from his prior *Family Guy* fixation, became the first 300-pounder to hold the title, which has traditionally been held by cruiserweights, with Samoa Joe and **Kurt Angle** being notable exceptions. The win also made Abyss the second "Grand Slam" champion in the company's history, joining **AJ Styles** as the only men ever to hold the World, tag team, TV, and X division titles.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Chyna's stay in TNA has come to an end. The company cut ties with her after photos and clips of an adult film featuring Chyna appeared on the Internet.

Rumors are swirling that Lucha Libre standout **Averno** may be heading to WWE to resume his rivalry with **Sin Cara**. Averno has been one of the top heels in Mexico's CMLL promotion and had a series of memorable matches against Sin Cara, which might again electrify WWE rings if the rumors prove to be true.

Several months ago, we reported that **Chyna** was embroiled in a controversy following news that she had filmed an adult movie for Vivid Entertainment. Just as quickly as the news surfaced, spokespeople for the former WWE I-C champ denied she was involved in any such film.

However, in early-June, Vivid released clips and photos of the movie on the Internet depicting Chyna in action. TMZ immediately reported that TNA would no longer be working with "The Eighth Wonder Of The World." The new film is entitled *Backdoor To Chyna*. And if you're expecting a travelogue about The Great Wall, you'll be disappointed.

It looks like Twitter may finally have met its match: **The Ultimate Warrior** has set up an account. Now the man who once rambled bizarre promos about the "powers of destrucity" is sharing his thoughts via social media. In his first tweet, Warrior took a pot shot at his arch-enemy Hulk Hogan, writing, "Karma is coming to collect." Let the Warrior-to-TNA rumors begin!

Say what you will about WSU wrestler **Britteny Savage**, but one thing you can never say about her is that she isn't dedicated. By virtue of her WSU J-Cup victory in April, Savage earned a future shot at **Mercedes Martinez**' WSU championship. Savage was so determined to get inside the champion's head that when Martinez traveled to Inasec-TV's headquarters in Canada to shoot footage for WSU's web-based *Uncensored* show in early-June, Savage arrived on the set and attacked her. Few wrestlers we know are willing to drive from northern New Jersey to Canada just to tell their opponents they're in for a long night when they meet.

"It's my time to represent WSU as champion," Savage said. "Mercedes has had things go her way long enough." Savage vs. Martinez will be the champion's 44th title defense in a 30-day period.

Former announcer **Milt Avrushkin** died on May 28 at the age of 64. Avrushkin was the voice of the Canadian promotions Superstars of Wrestling and International Wrestling, and was part of Pro Wrestling Canada. Avrushkin was a knowledgeable and respected announcer for more than two decades, and was an admired and influential figure in the Canadian wrestling scene. □

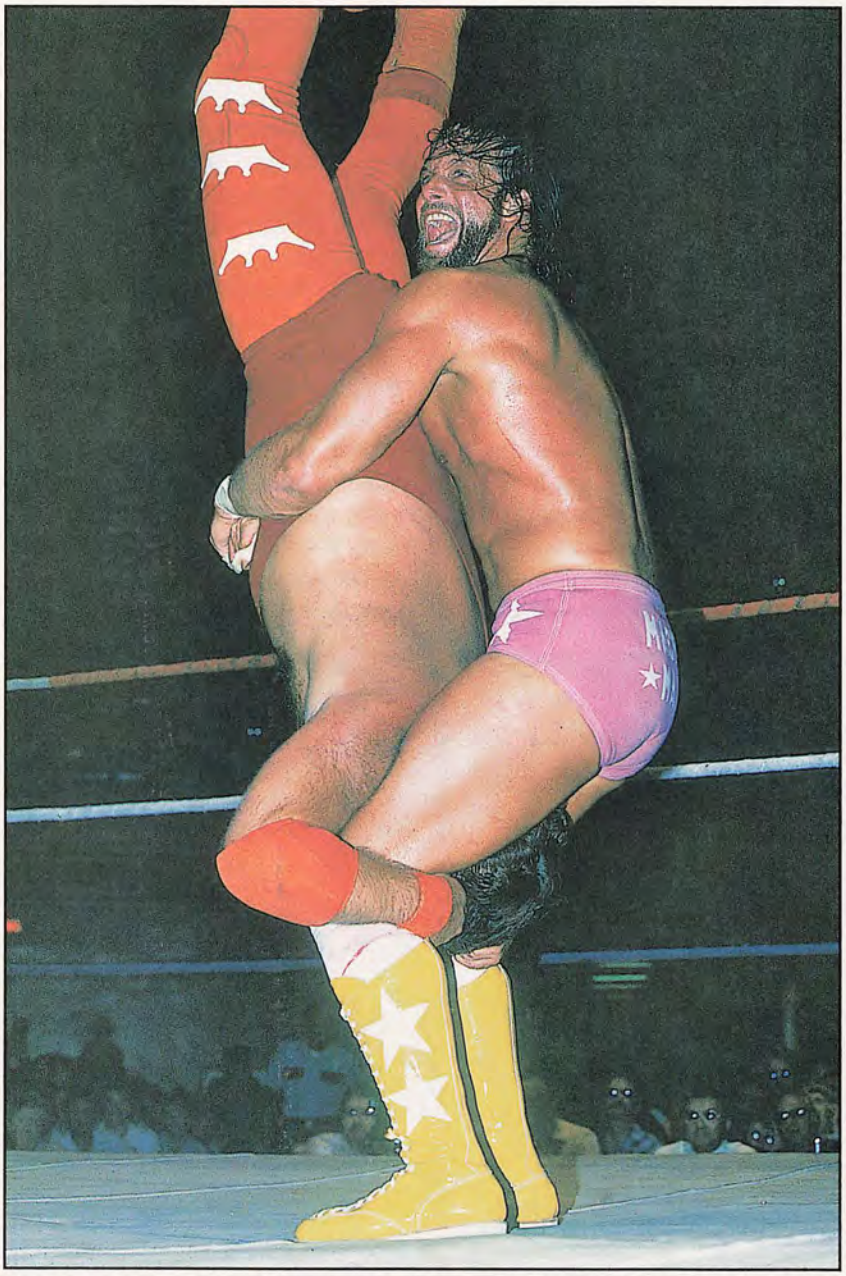
Photo by Frank Krewda

How keyed up is Britteny Savage (wrestling Brittany Force) for her upcoming showdown with WSU champion Mercedes Martinez? So keyed up that she recently trailed the champ to a studio in Canada just to confront her.

ON ASSIGNMENT

IT USED TO be that when a friend or a colleague passed away, you would get a somber phone call from someone sharing the bad news.

I didn't get a phone call like that when Randy Savage died. I found out from Twitter, as dozens of "R.I.P. Macho Man" tweets erupted on May 20. I texted Frank Krewda for confirmation, then went online to search out the sad details. This is how we hear of death in the digital age.



The memory of Randy Savage's classic feud with Jerry "The King" Lawler will live forever in the minds of Memphis fans and our own Liz Hunter. Shortly after this series ended in 1985, Savage made his debut in the WWF.

Randy Savage wasn't part of the digital age. He couldn't be summed up in a 160-character tweet or a link on Facebook—or even a 900-word column, for that matter. His essence couldn't be distilled into simple adjectives. He was a unique character and a unique person.

I knew both Randy, the man, and Randy, "Macho Man." I had opportunities to see him when the cameras weren't rolling, to converse with him when he wasn't growling in his often-imitated, never-to-be-duplicated voice. He would draw a crowd everywhere he went, even though he was actually a relatively quiet and private person.

Many times, when he was out after the matches—at the hotel, a late-night restaurant, or in the hallway of the arena—he would see me and announce, "Here comes Miss Elizabeth!" Everyone would stop and look my way, their expressions changing from excitement to confusion to, let's face it, disappointment right before my eyes. I was the "other Miss Elizabeth" ... "Elizabeth the Lesser." Randy never got tired of that. And, to be honest, neither did I.

Since Randy's death, I have been invited to appear on several radio and television shows to talk about the "Macho Man." Some of my colleagues have accepted those offers. I have declined all of them.

People want to know "what Randy Poffo was really like." I say, it doesn't matter. Very few people knew Randy Poffo, and that's the

BY LIZ HUNTER

way he wanted it. We knew the "Macho Man." We knew a character that was bigger than life, more colorful than a bag of Skittles. He was a perfectionist in every sense of the word. He was an incredible worker who demanded the best out of himself and his opponents. He wanted nothing more than to please the fans and to live up to his own lofty work ethic.

That flying elbowdrop finisher of his had to take a toll on his knees and back, yet he did it every night, regardless of whether there were 20,000 fans in the building or 2,000 fans in the building. Randy Savage lived to entertain. His matches, his interviews—even the seemingly insane, rambling ones—were deliberately crafted and cultivated, designed to draw in the audience and forge an instantaneous connection with this frizzy-haired, raspy-voiced weirdo in the ridiculous robe and sunglasses.

He transcended pro wrestling in a way few wrestlers have ever been able to. Hulk Hogan and Ric Flair were beloved wrestlers. The Rock and Steve Austin found success in Hollywood. But Randy Savage was a pop culture icon. He wrestled, he rapped, he sold a ridiculous amount of Slim Jims, he stole the show in the first *Spider-Man* movie. He wore many hats, literally and figuratively. But he was always the "Macho Man"; there could be no mistaking that.

Randy wasn't a saint. He had his flaws, just like we all do. He could be paranoid, especially over Elizabeth. He had anger issues. He could be moody, irritable, and standoffish. Maybe he felt the pressure of having to be "on" all the time ... to always be the "Macho Man."

Savage was reluctant to let the public in on his private life, which is why he didn't acknowledge his marriage to Elizabeth Hulette when she became his manager in 1985. The two were "wed" at SummerSlam 1991 and were divorced a year later.

Here is what I know. Randy Savage will be remembered for the persona he created and the things he did in the ring, where he was an innovator and an entertainer. When I remember Randy, I will remember some of the times we shared together, but mostly I will remember his matches—the matches he worked so hard to create. I will remember his Memphis feud with Jerry "The King" Lawler. I'll remember his war with Ricky "The Dragon" Steamboat. I'll remember his two WWF World title reigns and his masterful Intercontinental title reign. And I'll remember every single promo where the "Macho Man" kept me spellbound.

People have asked me whether Randy will be inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2012. It seems very likely, but in the end, whether Vince McMahon chooses to enshrine Randy or not doesn't matter at all. Savage's body of work speaks for itself. Anyone who knows the first thing about wrestling knows that Savage is one of the all-time greats. The WWE Hall of Fame needs Randy Savage much more than Randy Savage needs the WWE Hall of Fame.

As sad as Savage's passing has been, I took solace in hearing of his interment. According to his brother, Lanny Poffo, Savage was cremated. His ashes were scattered around a tree that held a special place in his heart, the same tree where he had spread the ashes of a beloved dog that had passed away. There was to be no public ceremony. No glitz, no hoopla. Just a serene and private ceremony where Randy joined a loyal and loved friend.

The Randy I knew would have wanted it that way.

Heaven just got a little more macho. *Ohh, yeah.* □

ON THE FARM

BY LOUIE DEE

THE BIGGEST NEWS on the farm of late has nothing to do with the performers in Florida Championship Wrestling and everything to do with a man whose office is in Stamford, Connecticut, 1,000 miles away from WWE's developmental territory in Tampa.

As officially announced in early-April and later confirmed during WWE's quarterly investors conference call, Triple-H has been tabbed as the head of WWE's revamped talent development department.

From the WWE press release:

"In addition to focusing on the expansion of the company, the company will bolster its core business with the launch of a new talent development department headed by Paul 'Triple-H' Levesque. The new department will put a greater emphasis on worldwide recruitment, training, and character development to identify future WWE Superstars and Divas."

The FCW roster is expected to be beefed up heavily as Triple-H and his team of scouts finds talent from around the world. As for the current FCW hopefuls, they'll be directly under Triple-H's watchful eye, which could end up being a plus or a minus to their careers. It is not known at this point how much time Triple-H will spend in Tampa with the younger talent. His main mission will be to find the talent and put them in the capable hands of FCW President Steve Keirn and his staff.

But in Triple-H, WWE has a true student of the game who learned at the hands of another master in Killer Kowalski. And, having been with WWE for more than 15 years now, he is quite possibly the perfect bridge between the old school, the Attitude Era, and the PG WWE of today.

And for all those who write this off to nepotism, WWE's former VP of Talent Relations Jim Ross has this to say: "Triple-H being part of the family can only be a boost to his ability to do this job. While he's got the credentials as it is, anyone who knows 'The Game' knows he simply won't accept failure, especially from himself. Now that he's got the 'family business' on the line, he simply won't."

The New Era Has Already Begun. The first few weeks of the Triple-H era have already seen a big surge in talent heading down to Tampa, with five notable newcomers joining the FCW ranks this spring.

The first is actually somewhat of a holdover in Alexander Rusev, who formerly competed in California as The Bulgarian. While he has been under contract since late-2010, he has finally made his FCW debut.

Two new Divas are also part of the ranks: lovely Texan brunette Ashley Miller

Photo by George Napolitano

Sheamus' development as a top-tier WWE star was based largely on what he learned during his months-long feud with Triple-H. In his new position as head of talent development, HHH will have a huge impact on the future of the company.

and Tampa model Eden Stiles. Miller has only been introduced so far, but Stiles has had quite a run already. She spent her first few weeks as part of then-FCW champion Lucky Cannon's entourage, and was the ring announcer for a few episodes of *WWE Superstars* in May.

The biggest newcomer is 6'6" 270-pounder Ethan Levin, the first wrestler of Israeli descent to sign a WWE contract. Last but not least is former independent star Jon Moxley, who finally made his way to Tampa in mid-May. While he has yet to appear on FCW TV as of press time, he has been present at TV tapings and was expected to make his in-ring debut early this summer.

Title Turmoil. New bosses and new co-workers always means a shakeup, and for those already in FCW, it seems no one is safe—especially if you wear championship gold around your waist.

Both the Florida heavyweight and Florida tag team championships changed hands at the same set of *FCW TV* tapings, with a third-generation star finally getting his revenge and a new tag team announcing their intent to dominate.

The third-generation star is Bo Rotundo, who after three months on the chase finally dethroned Lucky Cannon to regain the Florida title. Following the victory, he was joined in the ring by Hall of Famer Dusty Rhodes and his father, Mike Rotundo, for a celebration, making it a night Bo truly will never forget.

"Having my dad there to not only see me win the belt, but also celebrate with me ... there are no words," an overjoyed Rotundo told "On The Farm." "I never really got to enjoy the first reign after that jerk [Cannon] sabotaged me, but the second time will be sweeter—and I promise I won't let Lucky Cannon or anyone take this title anytime soon."

Earlier in the night, the duo of Big E Langston and Calvin Raines became the eighth team in the past calendar year to hold the FCW tag team title when they ended the tumultuous seven-week reign of Seth Rollins and Richie Steamboat.

Raines himself had been on a big run, having won the recent FCW Grand Royale to earn a title shot that he ultimately lost. Now that the tag belts are around his and Langston's waists, "Baltimore's Gift To WWE" indicated that it's only the beginning.

"Look at us. Big E is a 285-pound monster who moves around like a cat, and I'm chiseled perfection," said a confident Raines. "We can't be stopped, and everyone in the FCW Universe is about to find out when it Raines, just how bad it pours!"

If the first wave of summer has been any indication, FCW's "Summer Slamarama 2011" tour will be a "can't-miss" series of events for our readers in the Sunshine State. □

Photo by Lyle C. Williams

Former CZW champion Jon Moxley traded in his name for a chance to make it big in WWE. Now wrestling as Dean Ambrose, the 25-year-old has been impressive during his early appearances in FCW.

BACK ISSUES OF the Wrestler

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Aug. 1981: Ted DiBiase: "Now I Know I Can Defeat Harley Race." Also: Mr. Wrestling II-Assassins, Dusty Rhodes, Sgt. Slaughter, Austin Idol, Blackwell-Gagne, Valentine-Bravo, Rick Martel, Bobby Eaton.

April 1982: How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Pedro Morales, Eric Embry, Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Roop-DiBiase, Armstrongs, John Studd.

July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

Aug. 1982: Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.

Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Putski & Snuka, Roddy Piper, Brian Blair, Chick Donovan, scaffold matches.

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Exclusive Analyses By The Champions Themselves
IVAN PUTSKI: "I HAVE NOTHING BUT RESPECT FOR SUPERFLY SNUKA"

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.

July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

Oct. 1983: Record-Breaking Seventh Title Reign: Harley Race Defeats Ric Flair For The NWA Title. Also: Ron Bass, Mr. Olympia-Mr. Wrestling II, Sawyer-Murdoch, Ann Gunkel, Briscos, Dillon-Mosca, Frank Tunney.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

July 1986: How King Kong Bundy Became The WWF's Most Hated Man. Also: Lex Luger, Nikita Koloff-Billy Graham, The Fabulous Ones, Ric Flair, Rick Martel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

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June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

May 1989: Rick Steamboat—Champion; Rick Steamboat—Challenger: Which Is Better? Also: Sid Vicious, Dusty Rhodes, Savage-Hogan, Samoan Swat Team, Wendi Richter.

June 1989: Ultimate Warrior's Mission Impossible: Destroy Randy Savage For Hulk Hogan. Also: Rick Steamboat, Rick Martel, Larry Zbyszko, Luger-Windham by Sting, Ric Flair.

July 1989: Dino Bravo: The Man Hulk Hogan Cannot Beat! Also: Flair-Steamboat, Rhodes & Perez, Road Warriors & Ellering, Michael Hayes.

Dec. 1989: Gary Hart: "Muta Took The Sting Out Of Sting!" Also: Ken Patera, Larry Zbyszko, Skyscrapers, Andre & Ultimate Warrior, Barry Windham, Rock 'n' Roll Express.

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Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

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May 1993: Sumo Sadism: Will Yokozuna Make His Biggest Splash At WrestleMania? Also: Jim Cornette, Christopher-Jarrett, Benoit-Scorpio, Windham & Rhodes, Hennig-Luger.

Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.

May 1994: Aftershocks! How The Royal Rumble Shook Up WrestleMania. Also: Hulk Hogan, Boss, Douglas-Sherri, Patriot, improve WCW.

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Winter 1995: Exclusive Preview: Sting vs. Hogan: This Time It's For Real! Also: Steiners, Yankem-Undertaker, Bodies-Cornette, Arn Anderson.

Nov. 1996: Brian Pillman: Next WWF Champ! Also: Giant-Sting, Ray Stevens, Dick Murdoch, Cloudy, John Tenta, WCW shuffle.

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THUMBS UP

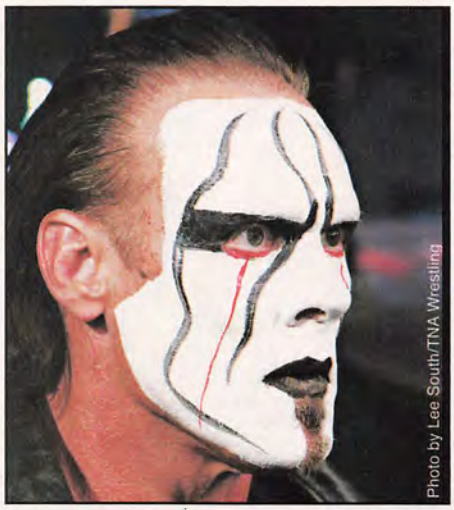
Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Up to Sting. When Sting was told he could name his own challenger to the TNA World title, the temptation could have been to name the weakest opponent possible to preserve his title. Instead, the 52-year-old instantly lobbied to fight the younger, potentially more explosive Rob Van Dam at Sacrifice, citing how Van Dam was technically never beaten when stripped of the TNA title in 2010. Now with a clean win over Van Dam in a match he actually requested, Sting has proven he is a fighting champion who will duck no challenger. He is a man of honor in a sport that's so lacking in that area.

Photo by George Napolitano

Thumbs Up to Michael Cole. As the saying goes, "It takes a big man to admit when he is wrong." For more than six months, Cole was just wrong. The broadcaster had been verbally abusive to several wrestlers, and even began physically interjecting himself in Jerry Lawler's matches. At his lowest, he made fun of "The King" for losing his mother. In spite of that, we applaud Michael Cole for coming out the night after a humiliating Kiss My Foot match loss to Lawler at Over the Limit and apologizing. He might have a long way to go before he makes peace, but it was nice of him to try.

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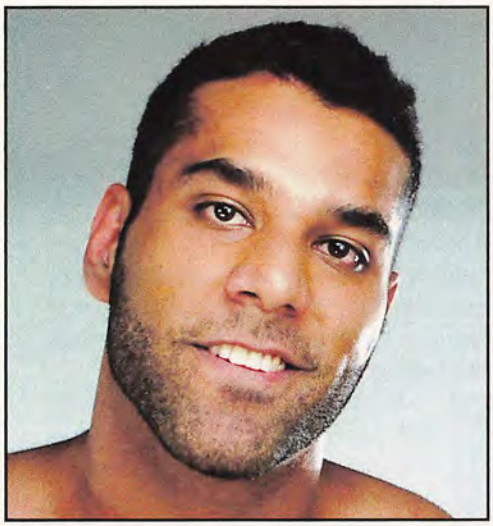
Thumbs Up to Michelle McCool. It is kind of a rare thing when pre-match stipulations are honored. As WWE's first Divas champion—and the 2010 *PWI* Female 50 winner—it makes it all-the-more surprising that 31-year-old McCool would throw it all away just to honor an agreement to leave WWE should she lose to her former Lay-Cool "bestie" Layla El at Extreme Rules. Despite the disappointing loss, and subsequent attack by Kharma, McCool kept her dignity by staying true to her word. If we never see McCool in a ring again, we choose to remember her as the backbone of WWE's women's division that she has been for several years. We wish her the best.

Photo by George Napolitano

Thumbs Up to Christopher Daniels. How ambitious is "The Fallen Angel"? Not only has Daniels been regularly putting in many a full day's work at Ring of Honor, but he is also now moonlighting with Fortune each week on *Impact Wrestling* as well. We knew Daniels was a very special kind of competitor. We have been saying so for years. We just never expected he could regularly defend the ROH TV title while spending his off days fending off enemies on *Impact Wrestling* with his close friend AJ Styles.

THUMBS DOWN



Thumbs Down to Jinder Mahal. Admittedly, we do not know a lot about the Indian wrestler who turned up on *Smackdown* in May, bullying the fun-loving Great Khali in an apparent attempt to embarrass him into becoming a monster once again. What we do know is that Khali is a former World champion and a man who has proven capable of beating opponents such as The Undertaker, John Cena, and Kane in the past. If he chooses to enjoy the adulation of WWE's crowds rather than forcing them to run in fear, who can blame him? Mahal would be wise to worry about his own career.

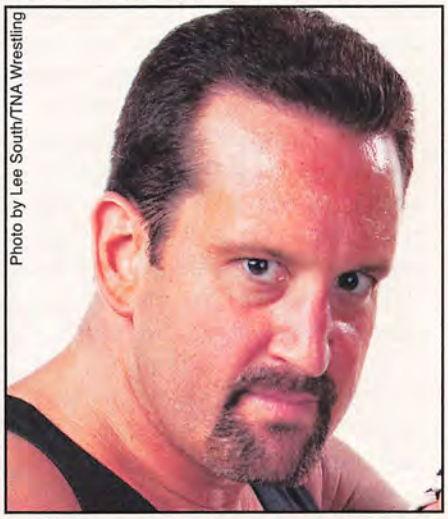


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Thumbs Down to Tommy Dreamer. Dreamer knew AJ Styles' neck was not in good shape when he piledrived him through a table at Sacrifice. He could have at least tried to justify it by saying he had been forced to do so by Bully Ray and other more vindictive members of Immortal. But Dreamer has offered no excuses whatsoever in attacking Styles and targeting his protected neck with a nasty assault. Regardless of how much Dreamer has wrestled hurt during his storied time in ECW, he was wrong to attack a performer that was just looking to get healthy enough to get back in the ring.

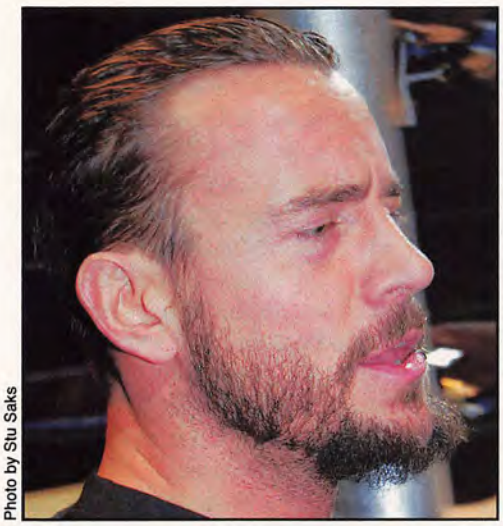


Photo by Stu Saks

Thumbs Down to CM Punk. Aren't some things more important than titles? If you were to ask Punk, he would probably say no. Only minutes before teaming with his protégé Mason Ryan to challenge for the WWE tag title at Over the Limit, Punk discovered his other Nexus brethren—David Otunga and Michael McGillicutty—had been savagely laid out by then-champions The Big Show and Kane. Seeing them in such obvious pain, Punk's reaction was to smile and tell them the title was more important and that they should "walk it off." If there is a silver lining, Otunga and McGillicutty got their revenge by winning the belts for themselves the next night on *Raw*.

Photo by Stu Saks

Thumbs Down to Winter. Whatever kind of a hypnotic spell Winter put on Angelina Love, it is wrong to use her as a pawn to get back at Love's fellow Beautiful People partner Velvet Sky for whatever ridiculous grudge she has. Winter should stand on her own two feet and face Velvet by herself. If nothing else, she should have given Angelina the privilege of making her own choice. One day, Angelina is going to break the spell and Winter will pay a dear price. Hopefully, the damage done to what was a beautiful friendship between Love and Sky can be mended at that point.

POINT:

WWE HANDLED RANDY SAVAGE'S DEATH IN A CLASSY WAY

BY DAVE LENKER

FOR WWE, IT'S often a case of "Damned if you do, damned if you don't."

Whenever sensitive matters arise—and the tragic death of "Macho Man" Randy Savage certainly falls into that category—there always seem to be legions of disgruntled fans and jaded media types waiting to jump down Vince McMahon's throat for one reason or another.

The company's slightest moves are questioned, the largest ones scrutinized to no end. WWE is a corporate machine, and, no, it certainly should not be immune to criticism from the masses. However, criticism should come only when it's truly warranted.

As far as the manner in which McMahon chose to handle Savage's untimely passing, it was done with pure class.

Just hours after it had been reported that the two-time former WWF World champion was dead, a statement was issued on wwe.com. The following week, *Raw* and *Smackdown* led off with memorial graphics; then, during the middle portions of both programs, a wonderfully produced four-minute video tribute to Savage was aired.

That Savage did not receive an entire two-hour tribute show to commemorate his career, a la Owen Hart, Eddie Guerrero, and Chris Benoit, is entirely reasonable. Quite simply, Savage was not a young, active roster member at the time of his death. In fact, he hadn't worked for McMahon in 15 years.

In the June 6 issue of *Time*, McMahon wrote a short but heartfelt piece in remembrance of Savage, recalling him as one of the more unique individuals to ever grace a WWE ring. Most poignantly, he credited Savage as being one of the "building blocks" of his company, and closed by referring to Savage as "one of wrestling's all-time greats."

Yeah, that's right. McMahon even busted out the "W" word, casting present company policy aside while commenting on this very "real" and emotional matter.

To some, that McMahon okayed a video package at all is astonishing. It's no secret that McMahon and Savage had not been on good terms for years. Many rumors have been floated since Savage left the WWF in 1994, and some have since taken on a life of their own. We may never know or understand why the relationships between them eroded.

Sporting a pink cape, Randy Savage is in all his garish glory. Senior writer Dave Lenker feels McMahon and WWE adequately honored Savage after his death and that the company can do no right in some people's eyes.

What we have in front of us are the facts, and the facts only. And those are, simply, that Savage has rarely been mentioned on WWE programming in recent years. Historical retrospectives on wwe.com have seemingly gone out of their way to not include him. And DVD releases, up until recently, have avoided showcasing Savage-related material. And then, there is the biggest slight in the eyes of many fans. That, of course, being that the "Macho Man" was never inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame.

In more recent years, there were tangible signs that McMahon and Savage were willing to move beyond whatever differences they had. At the very least, a working relationship was being forged. In 2009, WWE released *Macho Madness: The Ultimate Randy Savage Collection*, a three-disc DVD retrospective. Earlier this year, Savage was included as a playable character in the *WWE All-Stars* video, and even filmed a promo to hype its release.

These were all positive steps, and I have little doubt that Savage would have eventually been welcomed in the Hall of Fame. In fact, I still believe that he'll be inducted, posthumously.

Under the present circumstances, WWE did right by Savage, his friends, family, and fans by highlighting his accomplishments and legacy as one of the best ever. But there will always be those who are looking for more, those who want to nitpick. Regardless, McMahon's handling of the situation should not be questioned.

Dave Lenker is a senior writer for THE WRESTLER.

COUNTERPOINT:

WWE WAS HYPOCRITICAL IN ITS HANDLING OF SAVAGE'S DEATH

BY JEFF RUOSS

RANDY SAVAGE WAS more than just one of the greatest wrestlers of all-time. He transcended the industry, made an indelible mark on pop culture, and helped redefine entertainment. For a generation of fans, he was and remains an incomparable icon.

The word "legend" is tossed around way too freely these days, but Savage had unquestionably reached that status long before the day he unlaced his boots for the final time.

For these reasons and more, the fact that Vince McMahon opted to pay tribute to Savage only after he died continues to eat away at many of us. And by "us," I'm referring to Savage's fans, those who grew up watching and being enthralled by his classic matches and outrageous antics.

While watching the "tribute" video that aired on *Raw* just a few nights after Savage's death, I couldn't help but be filled with anger. Where was this commemoration for Savage and all he accomplished while he was, you know, still alive?

First of all, the video itself was hokey. Sure, it spotlighted Savage's career milestones and presented him in a very positive light, but there really wasn't much depth to it. The vast majority of clips featured Savage during his years in WWE, and only his feuds and matches with Hulk Hogan and Rick Steamboat were included.

Come on, there was a lot more to Savage than flashy outfits and "*Ohhhh yeah*, snap into a Slim Jim!" But, you wouldn't have really gotten a sense for any of that if you were too young to have experienced the prime of Savage's career. Why not include some more detail that explained why this man truly was one of the best ever?

Imagine being a young fan, sitting on the couch or in the front row wearing your brightly colored John Cena gear. You're watching this video, perhaps being exposed to Randy Savage for the first time. You're being told that he was one of the best ever. You're being told that his in-ring style was groundbreaking, that his over-the-top outfits and unique interview style were inspirational. Don't you think the very first thing you might ask is, "If this guy was so great, then why isn't he in the WWE Hall of Fame?"

That Savage was never inducted into the Hall of Fame while he was alive, that he was consistently shunned and ignored, and that his legacy was downplayed to the point it was over the years … all of it, combined, makes the gesture to supposedly honor him after his death seem so empty.

Whatever the issues—alleged, rumored, reported, or otherwise—that existed between Vince McMahon and Savage, there is no acceptable reason for Savage to have been treated the way he was. If he was "good enough" in McMahon's eyes to honor after dying, what is the message there?

The memorial graphic, the tribute video, the *Time* piece by Vince (which could just as well have been written by some PR intern) were all hollow gestures. The reality is, Vince only began to re-explore a working relationship with Savage in recent years because he saw an opportunity to make money.

Hence, the DVD, the inclusion in the new video game, a recent action figure release, etc.

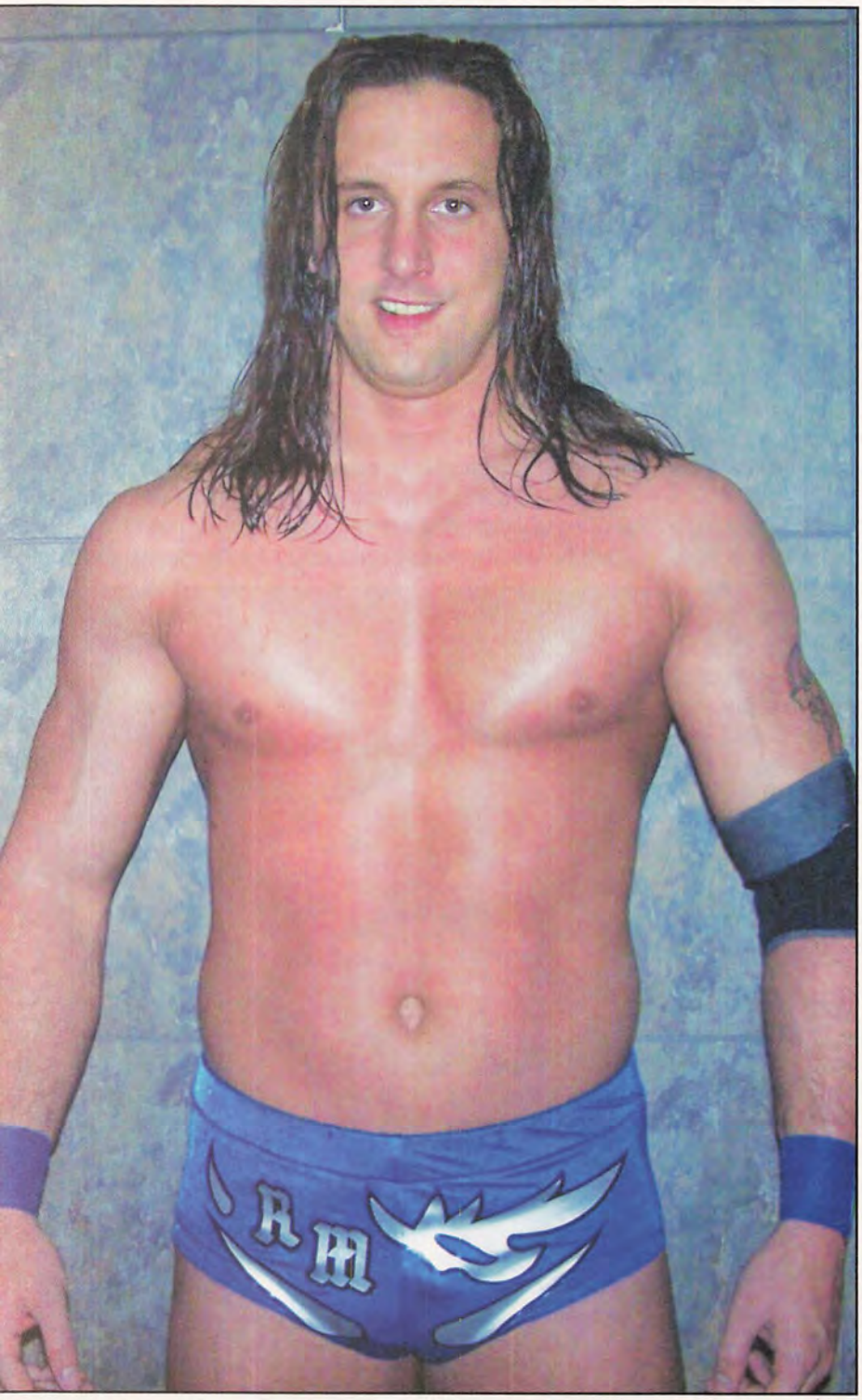
And should WWE look to "honor" Savage with a posthumous Hall of Fame induction, it will be just as empty a gesture.

Jeff Ruoss is a contributing writer for THE WRESTLER. □

The WWE tribute video showed sequences from Savage's classic WrestleMania 3 match against Rick Steamboat, but contributing writer Jeff Ruoss feels the "Macho Man" should have been honored while he was alive.

INTRODUCING

RYAN MITCHELL



RYAN MITCHELL HAD always wanted to fly. Whether he was scaling the top of his headboard as a child to leap onto his "opponent" or hopping aboard a small airplane with a family friend just to "fool around in the air," Mitchell learned from a very early age that he is happiest when his feet are off the ground.

Ironically, though, it seems as if few people have their feet planted more firmly on the ground than the 25-year-old former U.S. serviceman.

Mitchell enlisted in the Navy Reserves directly after high school, hoping the military would help him fill out his physique. He believed the stint would make more of a man out of him, and afford him the opportunity to see the world through the glass of the pilot's cockpit.

Most importantly, Mitchell hoped that flying for the Navy would instill in him the same dedication and heart he would need to someday become one of the top wrestlers in the world.

"The military made me more equipped to be a great wrestler, which was my idea all along," said the Pittsburgh-area native. "Let's face it. Wrestling is a very stressful career. I got some real hard-nosed training under the direction of the Marines (who trained the Navy Reserves). I learned the value and the importance of never quitting, no matter what the situation. Nobody can get by in wrestling without that kind of an attitude."

Ironically, it was not until he blew out his knee and was discharged because of his inability to fly that his plan to get into wrestling finally took flight. While living in Jacksonville, Florida, Mitchell became acquainted with Jon Davis (of The Dark City Fight Club), and, through him, former NWA World champion Dory Funk Jr. and another WWE Hall of Famer, Rocky Johnson. He credits his in-ring progress

BY BRADY HICKS

PHOTOS BY GIMMICK PHOTOGRAPHY

Ryan Mitchell applies a side headlock on Chris Taylor during his farewell match in Renegade Pro Wrestling in April. Having had a taste of action in a WWE ring, Ryan is convinced he'll be back to the world's top promotion as a regular before long.

to a very strong support system that includes Johnson, as well as a few encounters with "The Great One" himself, Johnson's son The Rock.

"There is nobody in the world better suited to train you than Rocky Johnson," smiled Mitchell. "Even in his 60s, the guy is in such tremendous shape. He was able to teach me so much not just about the mechanics of how to be a great wrestler, but also about the dedication to every aspect of preparing to get in the ring. He took care of me, even letting me live in his home in Florida. He had the connections to help get me better noticed. And he trained me for free, just because he is such a great guy. Rocky gave me everything I could have ever asked for. Through Rocky, I learned to eat, breathe, and sleep this business."

At 6'4", Mitchell quickly learned he cannot regularly take to the air with a flying headscissors or huracanranas, as he once envisioned. That does not stop him from catching his opponent off-guard with a breathtaking top-rope moonsault before hitting him with his Steel Curtain finisher (single underhook leaping chest- and face-buster), a move designed for him by Johnson himself.

Just as important, Mitchell learned the value of being able to entertain from Johnson's famous son. In working out only twice with The Rock, Ryan says he became aware of just how important it is to keep the fans entertained as it is to offer a physical in-ring presentation. "Nothing—and I mean nothing—has given me a better feeling in wrestling than seeing the way a crowd reacts to me," said Mitchell. "I like to think I'm a very good wrestler. But I'm even more proud of drawing from guys like Dwayne and Chris Jericho, making fun of my opponents, and just having a great time in there."

It is also through Johnson that Mitchell was given the opportunity to travel abroad again, this time from between the ropes instead of an aircraft's wings. In 2008, Mitchell traveled to Tokyo to train and wrestle for All Japan Pro-Wrestling. "It was such an experience to live and to train in the AJPW dojo with the other young boys," he said. "I'd been to Japan as part of the military, but this was such a totally different, amazing experience because I learned more and more every day about what it takes to be a wrestler."

In 2010, Mitchell was invited to wrestle Vladimir Kozlov prior to a *WWE Raw* taping in his hometown arena, The Igloo in Pittsburgh, where he had seen so many WWE shows as a child. As fate would have it, this would be WWE's final event at the venue before it closed its doors forever.

"I don't mean to sound arrogant," said Mitchell, matter-of-factly. "But I'm going to make it in WWE some day. I know that. WWE made the mistake of letting me wrestle for them, and in my own hometown no less. If they didn't want to sign me, they never should have given me a dose of their drug. Succeeding there on a main-event level is the only goal I have in wrestling right now. Nothing else."

Call it flights of fancy or even just a leap of faith, but Ryan Mitchell knows he will succeed someday in his career. He is just waiting for the clearance to take off. □

WORKIN' STIFF

BY AL CASTLE

THERE USED TO be a famous saying in the business, uttered in televised promos by such legends as Ric Flair and Dusty Rhodes. It went something like this: "The name on the marquee says W-R-E-S-T-L-I-N-G."

If only it were that simple.

In 2011, one of the greatest battles being fought in this sport has been not over championships, honor, or bragging rights, but over the "W" word.

Vince McMahon wants to do away with it, going as far as officially removing the world "wrestling" from his company's name. In April, World Wrestling Entertainment was officially re-branded WWE, with the letters, ostensibly, not standing for anything. McMahon has taken it a step further by directing all talent to avoid using the word "wrestling" in promos and interviews. Whereas wrestlers used to wrestle in a wrestling promotion, now "Superstars" perform in, what WWE's corporate website calls an "integrated media organization."

With McMahon looking to distance his company from "wrestling," TNA has jumped at the opportunity to distinguish itself from WWE, and has embraced the word. In May, Total Nonstop Action began re-branding its weekly show as *Impact Wrestling*. Nearly all references to "TNA" were replaced on its weekly program, and the company began an ad campaign that pushed the new marketing slogan, "Wrestling Matters."

Photo by George Napolitano

While WWE has actively removed the word "wrestling" from its vernacular, The Undertaker vs. Triple-H at WrestleMania 27 is a frontrunner for Match of the Year. Al Castle can't help but notice the inconsistency between what WWE says and what it does.

The mixed messages being sent by the two biggest wrestling promotions in the country may confuse some fans. On one hand, WWE claims not to be in the wrestling business, even while consistently showcasing some of the best wrestlers and wrestling matches of any major promotion in the world. If the epic showdown between The Undertaker and Triple-H at WrestleMania 27 wasn't wrestling, what was it?

What's more, WWE's recent corporate expansion has included the launch of *Tough Enough*, a reality show in which contestants are trained to wrestle. And WWE continues to scout the world to hire world-class wrestlers, such as Mexican sensation Sin Cara.

On the other hand, Dixie Carter's TNA—the company that is all too happy to proclaim itself a "wrestling" promotion—arguably features less actual wrestling per television show than any national promotion in history. On some two-hour editions of *Impact Wrestling*, the total bell-to-bell time has been less than 10 minutes. That's in part because so much of the show is taken up by acts such as Hulk Hogan, Eric Bischoff, Mick Foley, and Ric Flair—all legends in the business, but none of them active in-ring wrestlers. Even the promotion's 52-year-old world champion, Sting, only competes a handful of times each year.

Ironically, even while trying to distinguish itself from the other, WWE and TNA both have the same issue: Neither seems to know what wrestling actually is. WWE claims not to be wrestling, even while it delivers exactly that. TNA claims to be wrestling, but too often delivers anything but.

In a perfect world, both WWE and TNA would present quality wrestling, and take pride in calling it by its proper name. But in this world of corporate strategizing, it's no surprise that the two biggest promotions in the country have wasted time, energy, and money coming up with a branding strategy that will go over well in a boardroom rather than just doing the obvious: promoting wrestling, and promoting it well.

TNA has re-branded itself to put an emphasis on wrestling. In those scant minutes where *Impact Wrestling* actually features matches between men like Robbie E and Brian Kendrick, you can almost see its point.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Although their efforts are misdirected, the respective motives of WWE and TNA are understandable. In an attempt to lure major sponsors and appease Wall Street analysts, WWE is looking to shake the negative stigma that comes with promoting "rasslin'." TNA, meanwhile, is aiming to show the world that it is proud of its wrestling roots. And yet, through its vulgar portrayal of women, excessive depiction of blood and gore, and convoluted storylines, it too often contributes to the very stereotype that has driven WWE to scorn the term.

Fortunately, there remain some out there who both understand what wrestling is, and take pride in presenting it. In a press release announcing its sale to Sinclair Broadcasting, Ring of Honor, the third biggest American promotion behind WWE and TNA, described itself as a wrestling company "known for its athleticism and professional wrestling style while providing fans an entertaining, hard-hitting performance."

Somebody call the people at Merriam-Webster and provide that as a definition for the term "pro wrestling." It's a blend of athletic physicality, aggressive combat, compelling storylines, and characters. Not only is that what ROH provides, but it's what WWE and TNA, at their best, strive to provide as well. I hate to break it to you, Vince and Dixie, but you're both in the same line of work.

In his aptly named blog, iwantwrestling.com, former WWE writer and ROH producer Dave Lagana weighed in on the debate, and articulated exactly what he wants wrestling to be:

"It's not just two guys going out and wrestling for 45 minutes doing high spots. It's not just two guys arguing on a microphone. The sport of wrestling is a combination of everything that makes a great movie … compelling characters who I understand their motives and their drive … action that keeps me on the edge of my seat and so engaged I wouldn't ever look away. So does Vince McMahon have it right—entertainment matters? Is TNA right—wrestling matters? Or are audiences smart enough to realize these are just buzzwords? What happens from fade up to fade down is the most important; the entire branding of the product in the ring to what the announcers say, to the energy of the TV show, to the sentiment created by the audience. In my opinion … everything matters."

To that end, WWE and TNA, in their polar-opposite re-branding strategies, have actually delivered the same message. They don't decide what wrestling is or isn't. The fans do. □

Q & A

IVORY

"I still need to write a letter to Vince and Linda McMahon, saying thank you"

LISA MORETTI'S CAREER has gone to the dogs since she left WWE. That's what she told our sister publication, ***Pro Wrestling Illustrated****, back in 2007, when the former WWE Diva known as Ivory gave us an update on her life and whereabouts. Moretti now lives in an island community in Washington state, where she runs a pet grooming business out of her home. But this is more than a job to make ends meet after a successful wrestling career. It's her passion.*

Moretti has been deliberately keeping a low profile, making only occasional appearances on the indy scene, most recently accepting induction into the Women Superstars Uncensored Hall of Fame at an event in New Jersey.

If former WRESTLER Editor-in-Chief Craig Peters had to be manhandled by any of the GLOW women, we think he'd choose Tina "Ivory" Ferrari over Mountain Fiji (left) and Matilda the Hun (right).

It was a fitting honor for a lady who took a circuitous route to WWE, receiving exposure in women's-only promotions such as GLOW, POWW, and the LPWA before being offered a WWE contract relatively late in her career. She debuted in WWE in 1999 at the height of the Attitude campaign, serving as a bridge between the Sable-Jacqueline-Debra era and what would become regarded as the golden age of women's wrestling in WWE involving Divas such as Trish Stratus, Lita, and Jazz, among others.

Despite not having top-notch in-ring training herself, she quickly became the glue of those early Divas matches, defeating Debra for the Women's championship in June 1999, beating Luna Vachon in WWE's first female hardcore match that summer, and dropping the belt to Fabulous Moolah and regaining it from her in October of that year.

Moretti was a fan favorite during most of her career, except for an entertaining stint in Right to Censor, where—in a schoolmarm persona—she joined forces with Steven Richards, Val Venis, and The Goodfather to condemn what they considered lewd behavior in WWE. She enjoyed a third Women's title reign during this period, beating Lita in October 2000 and losing to Chyna at WrestleMania 17 six months later.

With her gift of gab and infectious enthusiasm, Moretti developed a reputation as someone capable of taking on anything that WWE offered her. She lent her talents to goodwill assignments and on-air duties, serving as a trainer for Seasons Two and Three of ***Tough Enough*** *and co-host of* ***WWE Experience*** *from 2004 until her release in 2005.*

"This is a bit different from 'Legends Q&As' that we've done in the past," noted Senior Writer Harry Burkett, who discussed a wide range of topics with Moretti during their 90-minute session. "First, she's from the West Coast and came up through GLOW, so she approached the industry with more of an entertainment background rather than rising through the typical independent scene. Second, this interview details the events in Lisa's career, but she is quick to give her frank opinions and analysis as well. She is unguarded and completely honest, not angling for a WWE return or the praise or acceptance of others. I found her bold and always effervescent."

Photo by Harold Harrison

Q: After you left WWE, you started a pet grooming business. Considering your love for animals, did you have pets while you were on the road as a wrestler?

A: Wrestlers can attest to the fact that it got to be commonplace to see little dogs in the girls' locker room. I started it by traveling with my cat named Frankie. Frankie was super-adaptable and probably racked up more frequent-flyer points than most people do. He was with me while I was working on *WWE Experience*, a regular on the Seattle to New York flight in first-class, of course. All the flight attendants and New York drivers knew Frankie the Cat. He joined us for the Diva photo shoots, including ones in Arizona and Cancun. One of the girls bought him a little sombrero.

Q: Is Frankie still with us?

A: Frankie was a weird cat. He would go with me on the subways in New York. I could let him out of his leash and harness when I stayed at the Weston in Connecticut and when I was in Louisville for Ohio Valley. But here I live on an island where there's no traffic and no predators, and he winds up getting smacked by a car—lights out. He didn't suffer. I just found him dead in the road.

Q: My goodness.

A: He was a true swashbuckler. He lived hard and died young.

Q: That's the way he'd want to go, I'm sure. Tell me how you got into the grooming business.

A: After WWE, I did the indy circuit for about a year. I was in Ohio about two weeks after Hurricane Katrina hit. I kept seeing on the news how people and especially animals were left behind. I was racing back home to do nothing on this island. So I asked myself why don't I go to Mississippi and help the animals? I told the fans that I would take any money spent on my pictures to the animal people in Mississippi the next day. We raised $450 in cash. I met my niece in Houston and from there we went to an animal shelter camp in Tylertown, Mississippi. It was a really neat experience and led me to think about getting into the animal business. I did a rescue mission with Best Friends Sanctuary, and people may be familiar with that group through the *DogTown* television show. So I came home and started a do-it-yourself dogwash. That led very quickly to a huge doggy daycare. We bought a tourist shuttle bus and used that as a shuttle bus for the dogs. We called it the Bow-Wow Bus.

Q: That's terrific.

A: We were embarking on our fifth year of business with 30 dogs in the yard every day. Then my partner and I had a business divorce, so now I work at my home with my grooming clients. It's an all-day event, and I take them for a big forest hike—because a tired dog is a good dog. I'm the pack leader. And I've bought another bus, but it needs a lot of work and I have to come up with a new name for it.

Q: What's the name of the outfit you run out of your home?

A: Lisa's Grooming Place. Isn't that boring? It's such a horrible name!

Q: We'll ask our readers to send in some suggestions! You were recently honored by being inducted into Women Superstars Uncensored Hall of Fame. How do you feel when an organization gets together and recognizes your accomplishments?

Photo by Frank Vitucci

For some reason that's still unknown to Ivory, Jacqueline went out of her way to go extra hard on her during their matches (left). Still, when confronted by a common enemy (Dean Malenko, below), the two women could work together.

Photo by Duane Long

"It was tricky going against those 70- and 80-year-olds, Moolah and Mae. I was all pissed off because I thought they were making me look stupid, but I had the honor of being in the ring with the most seasoned and knowledgeable gals."

Photo by Harold Harrison

A: It's really flattering, but it's way more fun after I'm finally there. I get uptight about doing a wrestling engagement of any kind, even something as honorable as an induction, because I feel like I don't belong there anymore. But I got so charged up by watching those great ladies matches, watching girls who really knew how to wrestle. It was fun to watch another generation coming up that really took pride in an all-girls card and putting on their own show.

Q: Were you really a cheerleader for the USFL?

A: Yeah!

Q: How did that come about?

A: Totally flukishly, just like wrestling. I was in my last semester at USC, and I was doing an assignment for one of my journalism classes. I was in the sports information building to interview someone. This lady was there and asked me if I liked to dance. She was the director of a cheerleading squad for a team called the Los Angeles Express in a new football league. She said she liked the way I looked, and that I was what she was looking for—I used to hear that a lot in L.A.

Q: You were like Lana Turner being discovered at the soda fountain!

A: Yeah, just like that. I thought she was nuts. How stupid. I'm going to be a businesswoman! I wasn't the least bit interested in wearing go-go boots and being a cheerleader. But I've always been curious and adventurous. It turned out the auditions were in Manhattan Beach, and I grew up in Torrance. It wasn't a gig in Hollywood, so it sounded do-able—it wasn't as intimidating. I went down there as she said, and took music that I liked to dance to. I made a total ass of myself. I didn't even remember what I did after I left the room. Of course, I got hired. Hence the motto that if you're making an ass of yourself, you're probably doing a good job as an entertainer. I graduated that year, in 1984, and we did games at the [Los Angeles Memorial] Coliseum, which was located at USC. So I enjoyed performing at my home arena for a cou-

Photo by Frank Vitucci

Wrestling in WWE's women's division in Y2K, Ivory didn't know from one day to the next if she'd be wrestling a skilled athlete, a talentless beauty, or a septuagenarian like Mae Young.

ple of years. They fired all of us in 1985 and had another round of auditions. I got back on the squad, but it wasn't as fun anymore because most of my friends didn't make it.

From there, my actress friend Nadine asked me to go with her on an audition for a wrestling show. I went there kicking and screaming, and I bumped into Mando Guerrero, and he bumped into me, and I was hooked. That's how GLOW started. Nadine became Ashley Cartier and my friend Annette from the squad became Jungle Woman. They kept inviting us back and about 15 of us went to Vegas to shoot the GLOW pilot. A few months later, I was offered a fabulous contract for $400 a week and a chance to live in a Las Vegas hotel every day.

Q: You had the snazziest name of any female wrestler I've ever heard, Tina Ferrari.

A: We had good characters. My coolest match was against The Princess of Darkness, otherwise known as The Voodoo Lady. She hypnotized Tina Ferrari with her mojo bone. It was a big plastic bone with a flashcube at the end of it. I would go around the ring bumping myself, as she commanded me to flip and fly and bang my head into the turnbuckle.

The purple scarf in her left hand wasn't lucky enough to save her most prized possession in her right hand (left). Ivory suffered the indignity of losing to 76-year-old Fabulous Moolah at No Mercy 1999 (below). Of course, Moolah got some help from her BFF Mae Young, but, c'mon, Ive-baby, that's no excuse!

Q: Were you pals with Jackie Stallone?

A: I chatted with her and asked her 20 questions about her sons. She was funny and wacky—a neat Hollywood person. Having her was really a good publicity stunt by GLOW. She was at our tapings for a couple of weekends, and, to this day, people think she was truly a manager and a staple of our product. They just used her to get press. She was like Mae and Moolah in that the producers and directors would cringe whenever she was on live, such as a Larry King-type interview. We did one of those shows, you know, with a city scene behind you and talking to a blank camera via satellite. She'd

"I was getting my ass handed to me by Jackie Moore. God must have put me together pretty good, because it's a wonder I'm not drooling out of the side of my mouth. That was my nine months of living hell."

Photo by Harold Harrison

sometimes get it wrong, and say she was manager of the bad guys when she was manager of the good guys. It was like WWE when whoever in the Gorilla position would tell us that our eight minutes were down to six minutes and we'd better talk fast or do our match fast. Mae and Moolah would go out there and take their good ol' time. "Tell the other guys to talk fast or cut their time because it's *our* TV time."

Q: How was David McLane to work for?

A: We made fun of him a lot and he took it. I have a lot of respect for him. We're about the same age. Whereas I've been doing these flippant, silly little things, he's still out there making new shows that get on the air. It's hard to get a show on TV, and he's done it several times, including something about hockey on roller skates and a couple of ESPN productions.

Q: Didn't you wrestle for the Ladies Professional Wrestling Association?

A: Yeah, LPWA. I was part of a few pilot gigs in Florida, and POWW, and then LPWA happened. That was Candi Devine …

Q: Susan Sexton …

A: Mimi the Magnificent …

Q: It was a classy old-school show from beautiful Las Vegas, with Ken Resnick giving that old AWA feel.

A: Ken Resnick! That show was super-intimidating.

Q: Were you a full-time wrestler throughout this whole period?

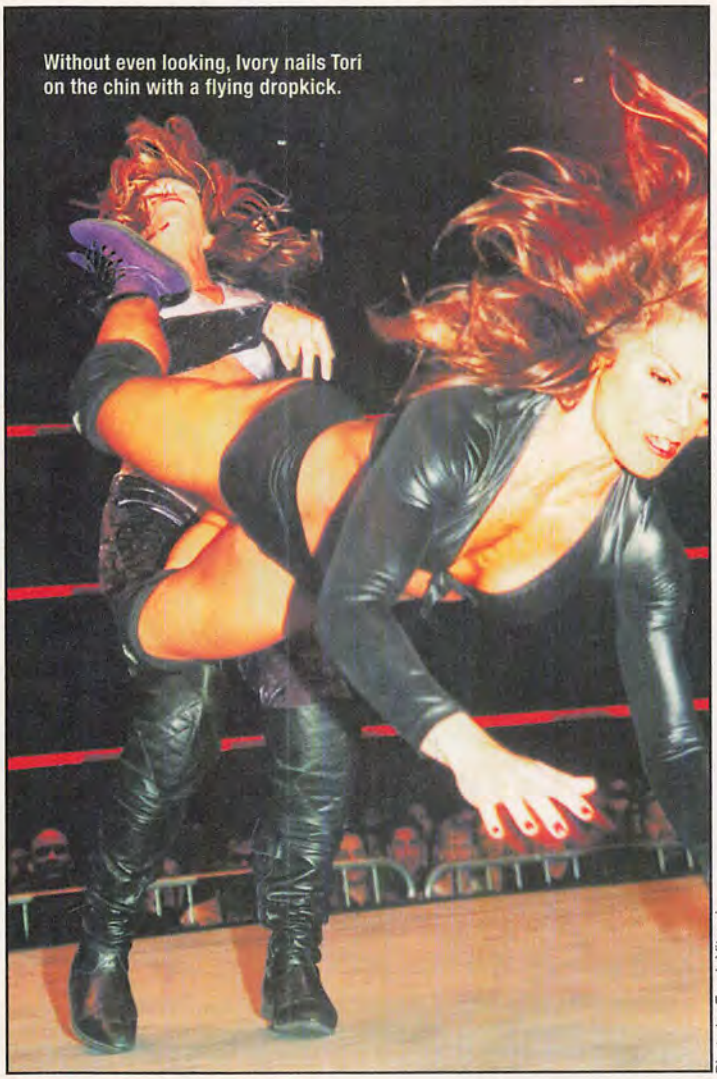
A: Wrestling took about four years of my life right after college. For 10 years, I lived in Los Feliz on the east end of Hollywood by Griffith Park and I used to ride my bike to Universal Studios. I had neat jobs. I even created a TV show and went out pitching it and stuff. When you're young, you have guts.

Q: What was the premise?

A: I still think it will be a big hit someday. It's a timeless piece.

Q: Maybe David McLane will produce it for you.

A: It's called *Femme Le Monde*, which means "Women Of The World." It features women from all over the world and all spans of time. They all come to compete at the Femme Le Monde Arena, which is a wrestling arena. There are wrestlers like Azteca and La Matadora, who is a Spanish lady bullfighter chick. I had all these beautiful drawings, had put a soundtrack down, made these huge figurines, and took them to boys and girls clubs and libraries all over Los Angeles. Somebody would tape me to prove to executives



Without even looking, Ivory nails Tori on the chin with a flying dropkick.

Photo by Frank Vitucci

that little boys—and this was when Power Rangers was really popular—would have no problem with an all-woman cast. If these women are cool, they'll watch them. To make it educational, I had teachers give them an assignment to create a woman of the world and write bios of what made her good or bad, what her special powers were, and her backstory. To this day, I have folders of these kids' drawings. I put this package together and went to Universal, Warner Brothers, and even the Dreamworks people.

Q: Boy, that's some moxie.

A: I was a little tiger! They would let me in and listen to me. They'd say, "This is a lot of material, this is great, but who are you?"

Q: Nowadays, you're just wondering whether to fix up the bus!

A: *[Laughs]* Isn't it sick? I worked for Revlon and hated it, so I told my bosses to fire me if they needed to fire somebody. This whole idea flooded out of me. I remember sitting in that bungalow in Los Feliz, hammering out characters and storylines. It was the most imaginative thing I've ever done.

Q: Compared to *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, it sounds like gold.

A: It *is* gold. Now it sits in my garage with all this POWW footage, even the master tapes. So I guess because I'm a wrestler I should be producer of this POWW stuff, but I don't even want to look at it. I know people would love to watch hours and hours of it. But I'm not even interested enough to go look for 'em. So they just sit here waiting for something to happen because I'm still worried about what to put on the bus! I might actually make 20 bucks a day with that.

Q: How did you go about signing with WWE? Did you have to do a tryout or dark match?

A: I was a very convincing Godfather 'ho for a night. I got a phone call from Jimmy Cornette, who was doing the booking. He needed a girl who looked good in a dress and could take bumps. He called Howard Brody in Florida at the time and Howard Brody called me, 10 years after not being in a ring. I said sure, I'll do it, but I have to be in San Francisco the very next morning. This was going to happen in Phoenix, so they had to get me out on the last flight after the gig because I was working for Revlon in a different capacity, being a national makeup trainer every six months. You know those people who go to hotels and put on a school?

Q: Yes.

A: That's how I scratched my performance itch. Anyway, it was really fun because it was a television night and there

Photos by Duane Long

Though a key component of the WWF's Attitude Era (wrestling B.B. in an evening-gown pool match, above), Ivory suddenly became one of the self-righteous members of Right to Censor. Come to think of it, for someone so ultra-conservative, Ivory wore a pretty tight blouse (right)!

"I think the whole six years were darn good. I mean, let's go on: I did every freakin' promotion under the sun, did all their TV shows, went around the world with Bradshaw twice."

Photo by Harold Harrison

were big cables running all over the place. I thought wrestling had really changed! This was cool! I saw Luna right away, and she was jacked up and totally different from when I saw her years before. She gave me a big hug. I really felt at home. I felt I belonged there.

So I did the 'ho thing and Jackie [Moore] beat me up, so they figured if I could survive that, I was worthy to get on board. J.R. called me while I was still in San Francisco, offered me the gig, and asked me to put a tape together because he needed something to show Vince who I was. I went home and made a tape where I tried to be as aggressive as I could. So I got on board and debuted in February 1999. Shortly after, I still had to tote around Revlon gear every once in a while to make it through that commitment. Near the end of that run with Revlon, the ladies in the school were starting to ask if I was Ivory in WWE. So the power of television is incredible. I learned that as Tina Ferrari. It's amazing how people can recognize you so easily.

Q: How did they come up with the name of "Ivory"?

A: I have no idea. It must have had something to do with the fact that Mark Henry and D-Lo Brown are black! But I've never purchased a bottle of ivory-shaded makeup because I'm pretty brown myself.

Q: So the mystery remains unsolved.

A: That, along with the purple scarf. That falls in the same

Photo by Duane Long

Ivory's defenses against former champion Lita in 2000 got downright nasty. The division was loaded at the time and it's a testament to Ivory's tenacity that she was able to have three title reigns totaling 331 days.

Photos by Duane Long

Ivory snapmares Molly Holly (above), a woman who would later become a close friend. The 1 minute 34 second title defense apparently wasn't enough of a workout for Ivory, who has to be calmed down (top right) and finally carried off by her RTC partner, Steven Richards (right).

mysterious category.

Q: I guess Mr. Perfect had a towel and you had a scarf. You were an interesting choice as Mark Henry's love interest.

A: Well, I don't know if I was his love interest. I was a decoy, someone to keep his attention from Debra.

Q: You were, it seems to me, one of the few trained wrestlers in the women's division at that time …

A: You mean I had you fooled, too?

Q: You did! To me, you were the Rick Steamboat of women's wrestling.

A: It wasn't until I was a trainer on *Tough Enough* that I started learning something. I was also a tennis trainer in college and I'd never taken a tennis lesson.

Q: You fooled all of us. But your first opponent was Debra, so I guess it wasn't hard.

A: No *(laughs).* And it was tricky going against those 70- and 80-year-olds, Moolah and Mae. I was all pissed off because I thought they were making me look stupid, but I had the honor of being in the ring with the most seasoned and knowledgeable gals. What a baby, huh?

Q: You're in there with a 76-year-old on the one hand, but, on the other, you were in there with Fabulous by-God Moolah! Who did you think you were, to even complain?

A: Well, I still had to kind of wait for everything. I was wondering when I'd ever get a chance to get in the ring with somebody who would make me look better than I was! Then again, I didn't have to do a lot with Mae and Moolah because they were so entertaining.

Q: How frustrated were you during that first year?

A: I didn't have time to be frustrated, because I was getting my ass handed to me by Jackie Moore. God must have put me together pretty good, because it's a wonder I'm not drooling out of the side of my mouth. That was my

"We had a lot of good talent, good people. And then WCW came on board, and more handsome guys came to town. Was I not there at the right time?"

nine months of living hell.

Q: What was that all about? Was she trying to teach you respect, or was she just heavy-handed?

A: I'm sure she didn't like me for some reason. I talked to Jazz at a Hall of Fame induction and said something to that effect, and Jazz said that Jackie was never rough with her. I think it's because she respected Jazz. I've rapped my brain about it for a lot of years. I was thinking, *Why does this have to be so painful?* It doesn't make you look good, and it doesn't help me make you look good. It's not professional. Finally, I had to open my mouth about it. I've got cuts and burns all over my body to prove it. You don't DDT someone night after night and not lighten up! You're literally driving my head into the mat with a tight grip around my neck. She would never talk to me before or after. I'd tell her, "This is a big ol' *Heat* match, let's just have some fun." Then we'd get out there, and, first punch, *bam*, she'd connect with my skull. Oh, great, here we go.

But we were the girls, and at least we got to wrestle and they gave us a shot. We had no storyline and I don't think anybody knew who the good guy was and the bad guy was. I would look out the curtain and see Scotty 2 Hotty and Grandmaster Sexay master the crowd with all their antics and talent. How the hell were we little girls going to go out there and do anything compared to that? I'm still jealous of Trish Stratus because she was the perfect person to pull it all together. But we had to do it on our own in those early days. Fit Finlay wasn't assigned to us and working with us every day, that's for sure. But I survived that and it was really fun. I still need to write a letter to Vince and Linda McMahon, saying thank you.

Q: If there was any year that was Ivory's year, it seems to me that it was 1999. Think of everything you did during that jam-packed year. You were a 'ho, a manager, a wrestler, Women's champion by June of that year, you wrestled Fabulous Moolah, and you competed in a four-corner evening gown swimming pool match. Your career was complete!

A: *(Laughs)* I don't know, I think the whole six years were darn good. I mean, let's go on: I did every freakin' promotion under the sun, did all their TV shows, went around the world with Bradshaw twice—literally, went to India twice, and saw the pyramids of Egypt. Then I did two seasons of *Tough Enough*. I remember doing karaoke at spring break on MTV with Road Dogg.

Q: Women's wrestling was still pretty shaky during your first year in WWE. It was coming out of the Sable era, but it was another year or two before you got into what I would call the golden age with Trish, Lita, Ivory ...

A: Molly Holly, Jazz. We had a lot of good talent, good people. And then WCW came on board, and more handsome guys

Photo by Harold Harrison

Photo by Mark W. Hill

Ivory reigned for 152 days before being toppled by Chyna at WrestleMania 17. Chyna pulled Ivory's shoulders off the canvas before laying across her for the pin in a casual manner that Ivory to this day considers disrespectful.

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Ivory offers some expert advice to Jamie and Johnny (John Morrison) during *Tough Enough 3*. You wouldn't know by her success that Ivory had very little in the way of formal training herself.

came to town. Was I not there at the right time?

Q: How did you squelch all that perky energy when you were in Right to Censor?

A: It was hard. Stephanie approached me back when she was a new writer. She was so nice back then and so fun to see at TV. She asked, "Would you like to be the only girl in Right to Censor?" I was like, "Dang, yeah." Gimme something to sink my teeth into—I don't care what the hell it is. Gimme something to care about at work—you know, *Jeez.*

Q: It sounds like you were begging for a reason to live!

A: It's so hard to be an action figure and not get out of the toy box to play that night. It's horrible, I hated it. I said, "Who is this Right to Censor chick? I'm there." It was really fun. I wish they would've gone a lot further with it.

Q: Yes, it was the only time Stevie Richards ever really thrived when he was in WWE.

A: We were a good team, man. Everybody could've had a backstory. I remember going to house shows and listening to Godfather do his soliloquy about finally seeing the light and how being with three girls at once wasn't right and go on and on, describing all the things he didn't do anymore. Of course, the fans were groaning because they couldn't believe he wouldn't do those things anymore. I remember thinking it was so great.

Q: Did you ever have any qualms about anything WWE was doing during the Attitude Era?

A: When I first got hired, I remember hoping they'd put me in wrestling boots because there was no way I could be a Sable—I couldn't relate to that. It wasn't the way I wanted to express myself. Sure enough, they threw me in boots whether I knew what I was doing or not. I would come home off tours and run down to Rick Bassman's camp in Huntington Beach to get thrown around. I had lots of ring rust to shake.

But the thing that pushed my buttons was what they did with Kurt Angle. I was in Connecticut when he was trying out. Here was this real live gold medalist, true blue, truly an athlete, yet we're making fun of that truly earned Olympic gold medal. We're carny athletes, bodybuilders who somehow survive the schedule, but here was someone who truly earned a gold medal with a broken neck. I thought about how much training he did just to become a gold medalist—without being paid to do it. And they took him and made him a big, prissy, whiny baby.

Q: Wow. That was the outrage for you?

A: They groomed us to hate him because he cared about his gold medal. What if *you* were a gold-medal winner and they treated you that way?

Q: I know what you mean. I didn't like it when he and Chris Benoit were fighting over the gold medal and Benoit dropped it in his trunks. It seemed disrespectful.

A: There you go, see? Imagine how we girls felt when our Women's belt—our Olympic gold medal—was given to a girl only because she looked good but had no ability? We know bad guys are supposed to cheat to win, and all that is part of the storyline and that's fine, but it was dispiriting when the wrong person wore our gold.

Q: You mean when the belt was treated like a fashion accessory, that it cheapened wrestling.

"It's so hard to be an action figure and not get out of the toy box to play that night. It's horrible, I hated it. I said, 'Who is this Right to Censor chick? I'm there.'"

Photo by Harold Harrison

A: I'm talking about people who got the belt just because it was "their turn." I was an example of the perfect middle card girl. I had the integrity to want to do a really good job and was stupid enough to think that if I did a really good job they'd notice, and, in hindsight, I'm actually sure they noticed because they give you a lot of crap to do because you're reliable and can get it done. When I was losing the title in an evening-gown swimming pool match to Miss Kitty, I was all pissed off about it. [Gerald] Brisco comes to me and says, "Ivory, you're not going to let me down, are you? I'm countin' on you to make this work."

Q: That's what they said to Dusty when they put him in the polka dots.

A: *(Laughs)* See? They know us suckers.

Q: What would you say was the worst match you ever had?

A: I've had so many bad matches that I can't really put my finger on just one. But I remember one of the most embarrassing things was taking a bump that nobody gave me.

Q: Maybe you were hypnotized!

A: The Princess of Darkness was probably in the stands! I was on autopilot and I did it because it would normally make sense to do it, but not because somebody actually did it to me. I took my niece, Lisa, my namesake, on tour with me a couple of times—along with Frankie and she brought her little cat, Gunner, too. After our house shows, me and Molly Holly would come back and complain about how it could've been better, criticizing ourselves, and Lisa would say, "I don't know what you guys are talking about. I thought it was great." We cared a lot about stuff working and being right on.

Q: Few of us will ever know what it's like to perform in front of 68,000 people. Describe the experience of walking into WrestleMania 17 as a defending Women's champion.

A: That was against Chyna at the Astrodome. That's what was great about Right to Censor: We actually had an angle and a couple of months' buildup. I wasn't intimidated at all; it felt very intimate and comfortable going to the ring. That impressed me. I was announced first, so Chyna could make her big entrance with her outfit and all. I felt like I was being hugged by the audience. Or maybe that was just a symptom of sheer paranoia.

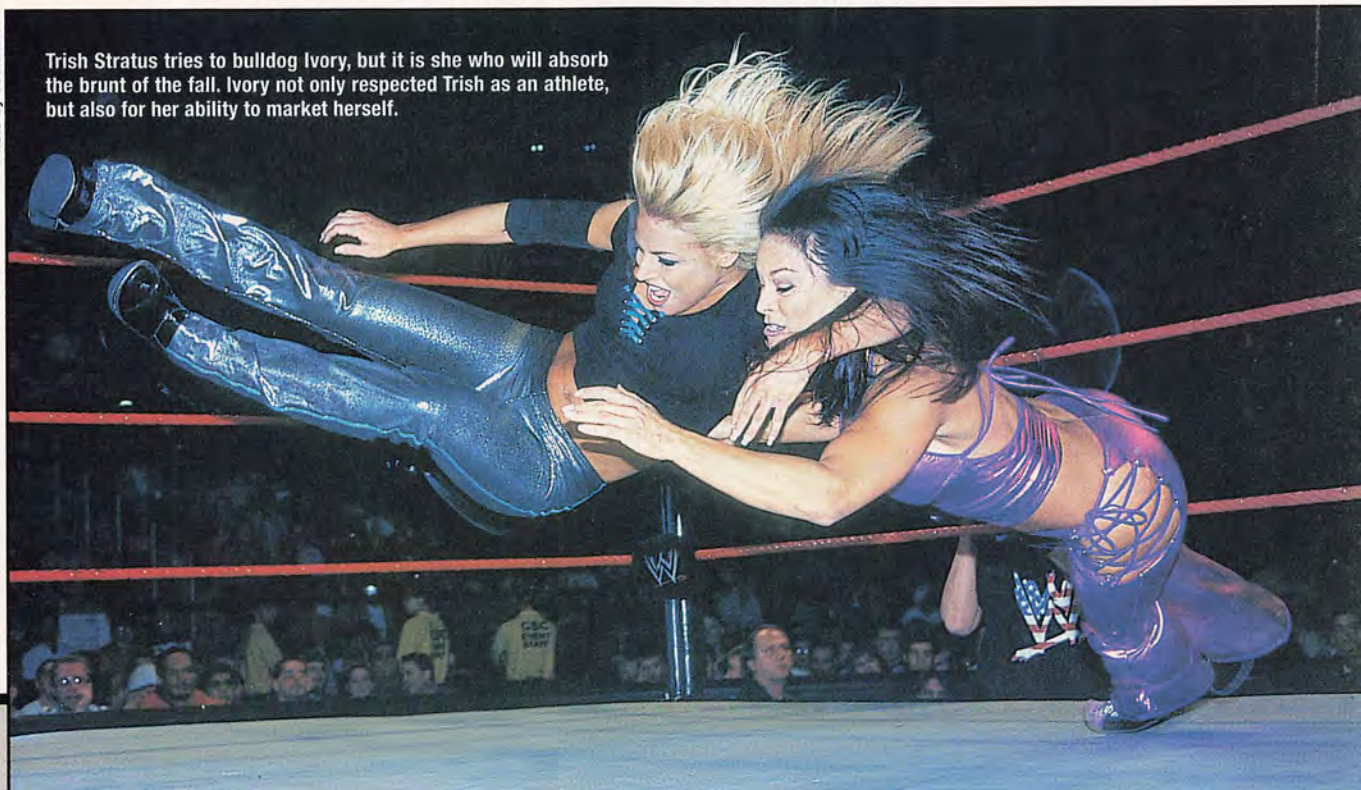


Photo by Joe Zanolle

Trish Stratus tries to bulldog Ivory, but it is she who will absorb the brunt of the fall. Ivory not only respected Trish as an athlete, but also for her ability to market herself.

Q: It must have been a wonderful feeling. Of course, Chyna was at her peak at the time, all glammed up. That was the heyday, wasn't it?

A: I still wish I would've kicked out, *dammit!* She laid on me disrespectfully, threw herself back on me like I was a chaise lounge. I thought, *Cover me right or I'm gonna kick out.* The Mae and Moolah should've come out in me! The next day, Steve Austin said, "I don't like the way she covered ya. You shoulda kicked out." I should've followed my instincts!

Q: "Stone-Cold" keeps it cut and dried. You faced Chyna in that match. We've talked about Luna Vachon. We know something has been going on with Chyna over the past few years. Do you think they would've encountered those problems if they had not been in wrestling?

A: I don't think they would've had those problems if not for the life of wrestling. Even before we started getting letters every six months about free rehab for drug and alcohol addiction, I said that it would be better if WWE offered some kind of counseling and re-training for new careers. It would be nice to have a non-WWE person in the town where you live to explore what you might want to do for the next three years or for the rest of your life—also marriage counseling and all that stuff. How about lining up careers in public speaking? There are places to channel these wonderfully talented people.

Q: At the time you were on *Tough Enough*, I interviewed a young lady from Maryland Championship Wrestling named Candie, who tried out for the show. She told me about how intimidating it was to see you there. I'm going to read a quote to you: "I had watched Ivory on GLOW when I was a kid and here I had the chance to be five feet from her. I would've loved to drink coffee with her and hear her stories. But I could've potentially worked alongside her. It's mind-boggling." Have you ever stopped to think of how many of these young girls thought of you as a role model?

A: I haven't stopped to think about it, but I'm glad I've made a positive impression. I've always been impressed by the respectful, nice mail I've received, from GLOW up to WWE. For some girls in GLOW, most of their mail came from prisoners. I feel like your mail is a good measure for whether you're transmitting the right message.

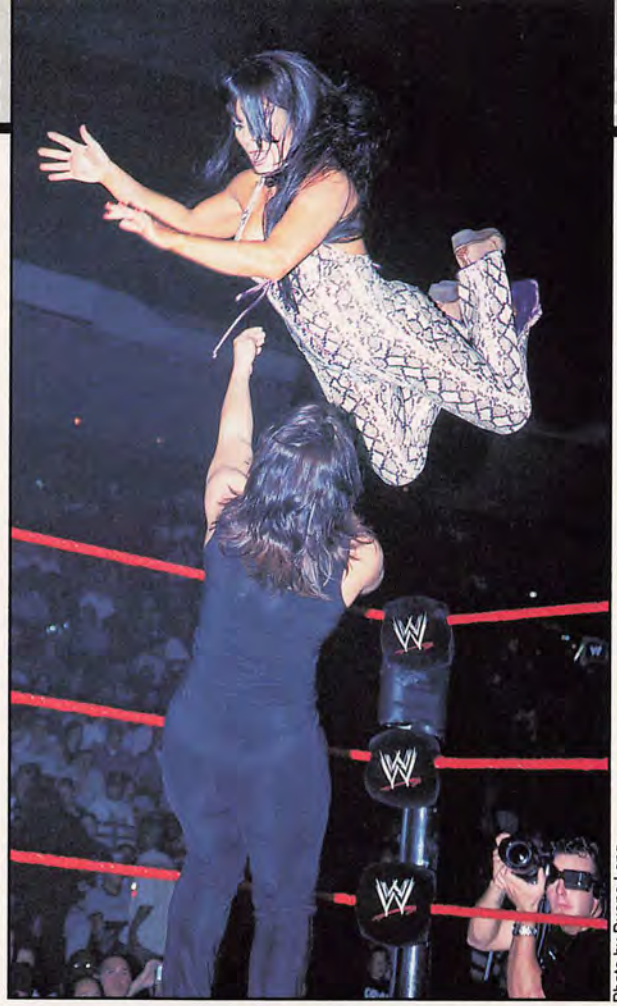


Photo by Duane Long

Ivory nails Molly from the turnbuckles, but she didn't do enough to regain the Women's championship in this December 2000 match. This would not be the last Ivory saw of Molly.

In 2006, Ivory and Molly set off on their "Kickin' Ass For Gas Tour," which brought them across the country on a working vacation to Connecticut and Stratus' wedding.

"I had the integrity to want to do a really good job and was stupid enough to think that if I did a really good job they'd notice."

Photo by Harold Harrison

Q: I know you were on GLOW, you wrestled Trish Stratus, and you were at WrestleMania, but your best role—and I'd have to say the highlight of my viewing life for about two years—was you co-hosting *WWE Experience* with Todd Grisham.

A: Yeah, we were good, weren't we?

Q: You had great chemistry. You two could've had your own talk show!

A: If we didn't strangle each other first! When I watched myself wrestle, it's hard to get past how fat you look, how crappy your outfit looked, how lame your match was—you can't even take it in because you're picking it apart so much. *WWE Experience?* I'd watch that and feel that was a shoe that fit.

Q: That's my point, really. I feel you really stood out in that role more than anything else. And it didn't seem heavily scripted.

A: It wasn't scripted and they'd yell at me all the time. Anytime we were in the park, they'd have to stop everything because I'd want to pet some guy's dog. Even Roy the Horse in Times Square knew me.

Q: Sometimes you were out there in the bitter cold, with your breath coming out of your mouth and holding a latte.

A: I have a whole wardrobe of heavy jackets now! I was so pissed when I had that stupid, easy talking job. I was so mad about not

Showing no ill-effects from the trip, Ivory (far right) poses at the wedding with (left to right) Lilian Garcia, Mickie James, Lita, and Molly.

Photo by Rohan Laylor

being in the ring. I felt that I had traded my boots for an IFB to stick in my ear.

Q: Do you feel that way now when you look back?

A: I'm always behind. Every time something good happens to me, I don't seem to be accepting of the latest new thing.

Q: Todd has never been shown in as good a light since. I think that was his peak also. He's done announcing and backstage interviewing, but there's been nothing that has shown his talents like that show did.

A: He was good out there with people and the space around him, and he was funny and quick. Certainly anybody that can work with me is a trooper, because I don't know what I'm doing. He could wrap it up real fast. The same with Michael Cole. Thank goodness I was always surrounded by people who were so good at it. Remember the WrestleMania All Day Long special (WrestleMania 19) with Michael Cole and me?

Q: Yes.

A: It was live for 12 hours, all the way from the morning and through the fanfest, the preshow, and all of WrestleMania. [Executive Producer] Kevin Dunn told me two days before that I was going to do that thing. I said, "I'll be frank with you. I don't really know much about the history of this company." He said, "It doesn't matter. Michael Cole will cover all that stuff. Ivory, you just be you, and that's all you've got to do." The pay-per-view things were hairy because you're live and you're plugged into the truck through your ear. You have to start counting down in your head while you're saying something. And you've got fans screaming around you and you're not supposed to look at the monitor down on the stage to see when a clip is done and start talking. So I have the utmost respect for those people. It's a lot going on in your head.

Q: Well, Todd wasn't as entertaining when he ended up in a dark room talking to himself. What led to your departure from WWE?

A: The change of networks had a lot to do with it. We went from Spike, where we had tons of programming time for our magazine shows, *Heat*, and all that stuff, and then went back to USA, our original cable network, and they gave us enough for *Raw* and one more hour—a total of only three hours a week. Kevin said, "Ivory, we just don't have anything for you to do anymore because of the change of networks." They had offered for me to move to Connecticut, but I couldn't make sense of that. Why would I leave a beautiful island on the West Coast where my family is for the most part, and where my house is, and I have nature all around me, it's paradise, and I'm going to move for WWE when they'll probably fire me in a couple of years anyway?

Photo by Frank Krewda

This past March, Moretti was honored with a plaque commemorating her induction into the WSU Hall of Fame. Lisa was quite impressed with the talents of the wrestlers in this all-female organization.

Q: Let me ask you about the event of the year back in 2007: the Trish Stratus wedding. How did you and Nora Greenwald (Molly Holly) think of the Kickin' Ass For Gas Tour?

A: That was me and Nora's idea of being totally campy and totally exploitive. We were going to earn money to travel to Trish's wedding and do it all wrestler-style. We lined up gigs for the whole trip to Toronto. We exploited the wedding entirely. We bought these cheap little greeting cards. Fans could buy a card for five bucks, fill it out, and

"I'm always behind. Every time something good happens to me, I don't seem to be accepting of the latest new thing."

Photo by Harold Harrison

wish Trish well on her retirement or wedding. Nora made a chapel out of cardboard with a slot on the roof so fans could put their cards in there, and we promised to deliver them to Trish. We even had veils for little girls to buy. I was gluing veils to little tiaras in the back of the car while we were driving.

Q: Trish certainly pulled a coup with that wedding. Didn't a wedding magazine have exclusive rights to the photos from the wedding?

A: She's so freaking adorable. One Christmas, Trish gave each of us a tape of our matches against her. I received Trish's matches with Ivory, and Molly received Trish's matches with Molly, and so forth. I copied all those tapes onto DVD and did a total bootleg. We had the best gimmick table at every show. My comment about Trish is that I don't know what Trish would do without herself. She's such a good entrepreneur.

Q: I have one final question: Have you stayed in contact with Amy the Farmer's Daughter?

A: Becky, the original Amy the Farmer's Daughter, was the best. Oddly enough, our worlds keep crossing. I bumped into Becky in Hollywood at a bar a few years later. Another time, I was in my old man neighbor's machine shop with every tool imaginable, and I noticed a really old girlie calendar from the mid-'80s hanging on the wall, and there was Becky in a bathing suit! Then some young guys in Texas who were working on a GLOW documentary put together a reunion for us in L.A., and that was the first time all the girls had gotten together in 25 years. Now there's talk about the GLOW girls doing signings and stuff at the next Cauliflower Alley Club convention. But I don't think I'll show up unless I'm getting paid. Besides, when am I gonna fix that bus? □

Lisa is happily retired from wrestling and owns a pet grooming business in Washington. She spends as much time as possible with her main men, Teddy Moretti (left) and Guy Timmons (below), both of whom are lucky to have her in their lives.

Photos by Harold Harrison

Photo by George Napolitano

TEXT BY DAVE LENKER

who do you hate?

THE MIZ & PUNK VIE FOR YOUR jeers

IT'S TOO BAD Cleveland and Chicago are separated by 312 or so miles, because with an age difference of only two years between them, had The Miz and CM Punk crossed paths during their formative years, maybe even attended some of the same schools, they could have been the absolute best of … well, enemies.

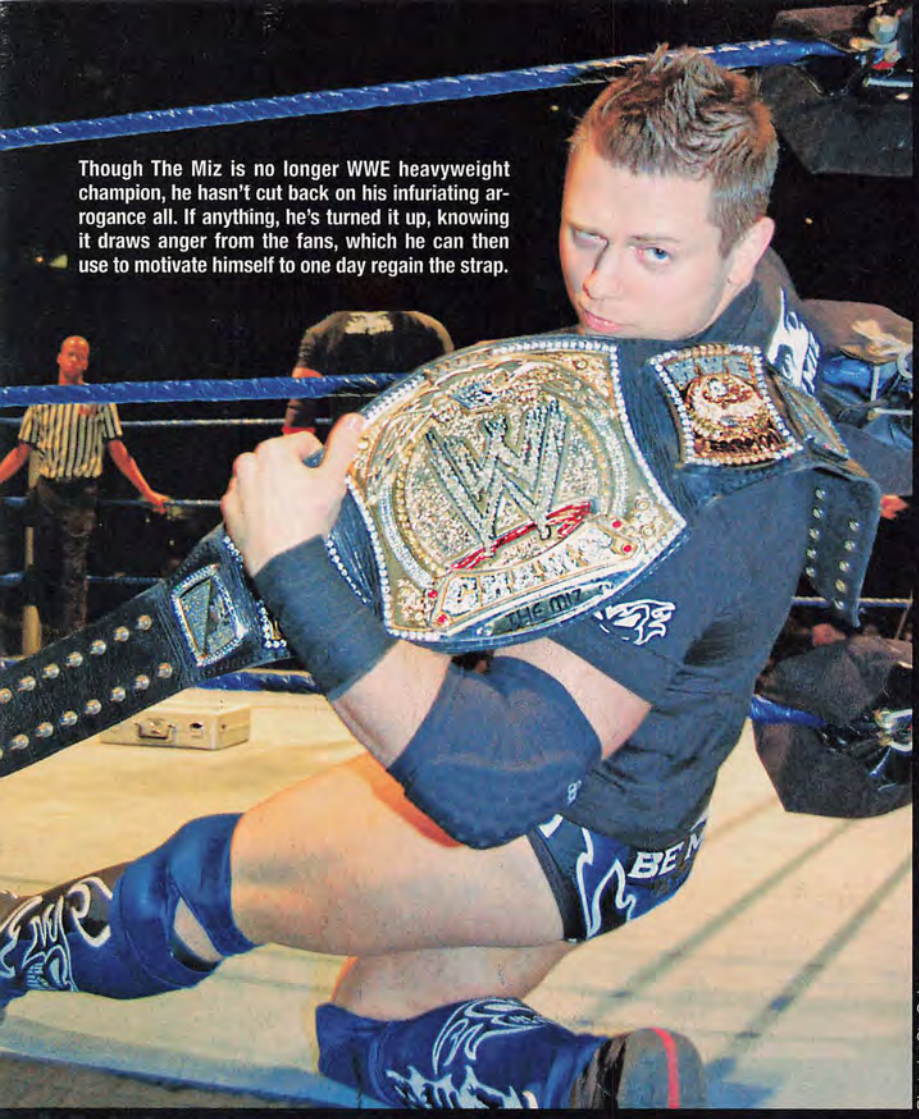
Think about it. Two of the most cocky and despised men in WWE both have spent so much time on the Raw roster in prominent feud after prominent feud that they almost have to have rubbed elbowpads in a locker room somewhere and commiserated at some point … compared notes, if you will.

But then think of how that might have gone. They never have forged much of an alliance and they don't exactly take a similar approach to their wrestling. For all we know, there may not even be much mutual respect or admiration there.

In fact, couldn't you see someone like The Miz being the way he is in part because many years ago he got bullied and pushed around—had the proverbial sand kicked in his face by someone like Punk? He must have had self-esteem issues at some point. Maybe he still does.

No matter, these two are both very, very good at being very, very bad, as in evil, nasty, bitter, and mean. They just approach their life's work differently.

Miz is in your face in the mold of a "Mr. Perfect," Punk much more so in your face like Jake "The Snake" Roberts. Miz thrives on telling the world he's superior to us in all his awesomeness. Punk meanwhile relishes pointing out that we're inferior to him and all his straight-edgedness. Subtle differences to be sure, but notable differences nonetheless. Judge the veracity



Though The Miz is no longer WWE heavyweight champion, he hasn't cut back on his infuriating arrogance all. If anything, he's turned it up, knowing it draws anger from the fans, which he can then use to motivate himself to one day regain the strap.

Photo by Stu Saks

of the respective cases that they make for themselves and their raging egos as you will. What we cannot argue is that loathing them both is something we love to do, and they certainly do thrive on all that loathing in their own ways.

Different though they might be in their approaches, their success stories are oddly similar. In retrospect, both were longshots to even make it to WWE, let alone dominate and capture world championship gold once they made it to the big time. One quick look at each tells you that neither has the size that Vince McMahon typically covets in WWE stars-to-be. Punk stands 6'1" and weighs in officially at 222 pounds, while The Miz checks in somewhere in the neighborhood of 6'1", 230. Both weights seem a bit exaggerated.

Punk is the rare former Ring of Honor independent circuit standout who not only got to keep his name when he made it to WWE, but didn't have to alter his persona at all. Miz was and is the annoying, fingernails-on-a-chalkboard grating former reality star (MTV's *The Real World*) who seemed more likely to follow in the professional footsteps of a Crash Holly than a Bret Hart.

Boo them if you must, but respect how far they have come against such long odds.

So if we dig a little deeper, what kind of role exactly does the hatred that both men elicit from crowds around the world play in their current and recent success? In both cases, a huge one. Punk is a master manipulator, while Miz arguably has used the

Where The Miz uses obnoxious tactics to elicit fans' hatred, CM Punk uses somewhat subtler language on the mike to get the reaction he wants. It seems The Miz is content to tick people off, while Punk likes to mess with people's heads.

Photo by Wayne McCarty

boos to motivate himself.

We all know Punk's history as the cult leader–like figure behind first The Straight Edge Society with Smackdown and more recently the second incarnation of Nexus with Raw. For whatever reason, a man with Punk's charisma can be even more appealing to tortured souls desperately searching for leadership, meaning in life, and direction if that person is despised. Those who feel like they are overlooked or even misunderstood often turn to those who seem to have faced similar travails and gone on to enjoy success in spite of a world that doesn't appreciate them. Punk appeals to the vulnerable, and as he gains followers, he becomes all the more hated.

Miz might not admit it—heck, he might not even realize it—but he seemed to set the bar very high for himself by being so arrogant so early in his WWE career that he forced himself to get better and better and better so that he could at least give himself a chance to back up the hyperbole of his speech with action. Would anyone even be fazed by his boasts of being so awesome if his physical game hadn't caught up to his mouth? He may still be a bit of a coward and a blowhard, but anyone who can hold the WWE championship for five months in this era is much more than just an opportunist on a lucky streak.

The look on Miz' face alone virtually anytime he addresses a WWE crowd tells you how much he is sustained the hatred for him, how much he wants to add to it, and fuel it. The look on Punk's face tells you how your hatred is playing right into his nefarious and cold-blooded scheming, how he thinks he's steering you in precisely the direction he wants you to go.

Maybe there's some secret competition or unspoken rivalry between the two men that we aren't privileged to know about. Or maybe they're both just that damn good at making us hate them. Come to think of it, a Miz-Punk feud could be quite intriguing and more than a little entertaining someday—only it would probably require one of them to start courting our cheers.

Would we really want to see that? □

The Miz grins knowing full well just how much the fans dislike him throttling Randy Orton. The Miz has the fans right where he wants them and joy of knowing that is written all over his face.

What angers fans most about Punk is that he's good enough to beat any WWE fan favorite, including John Cena, on any given day. Hey, if Punk—and The Miz—continually lost, they'd be much less hated than they are.

Photo by Stu Saks

Photo by George Napolitano

HE MAY FASHION HIMSELF A LADIES' MAN, BUT ANYONE WHO IS WILLING TO POSE IN THE LOCKER ROOM FOR A MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPHER WITH GAPING FACIAL WOUNDS IS MOST DEFINITELY A MAN AMONG MEN

RHETT ALL OVER!

"BOO ME BUT DON'T QUESTION MY TOUGHNESS!"

BY AL CASTLE | PHOTOS BY GEORGE NAPOLITANO

RING OF HONOR fans may have rolled their eyes the first time the man who calls himself "Addicted To Love" strutted to the ring to the cheesy '80s anthem of the same name.

But as of late, Rhett Titus has given fans reason to look at him in a whole new light. Robert Palmer, himself, may have described Titus' newly exhibited determination best.

"You can't sleep.
You can't eat.
There's no doubt.
You're in deep."

But it's not "love" to which the New Jersey native is addicted, but, rather, wrestling success. And in recent months, Titus has proved he'll put himself through hell to attain it.

"Sure, he likes to have fun, put on a show and make time with the ladies. But make no mistake, when that bell rings, Rhett is all business," said Kenny King, Titus' tag team partner in the All Night Express. "It may be hard for some people to believe, but Rhett's as tough as they come."

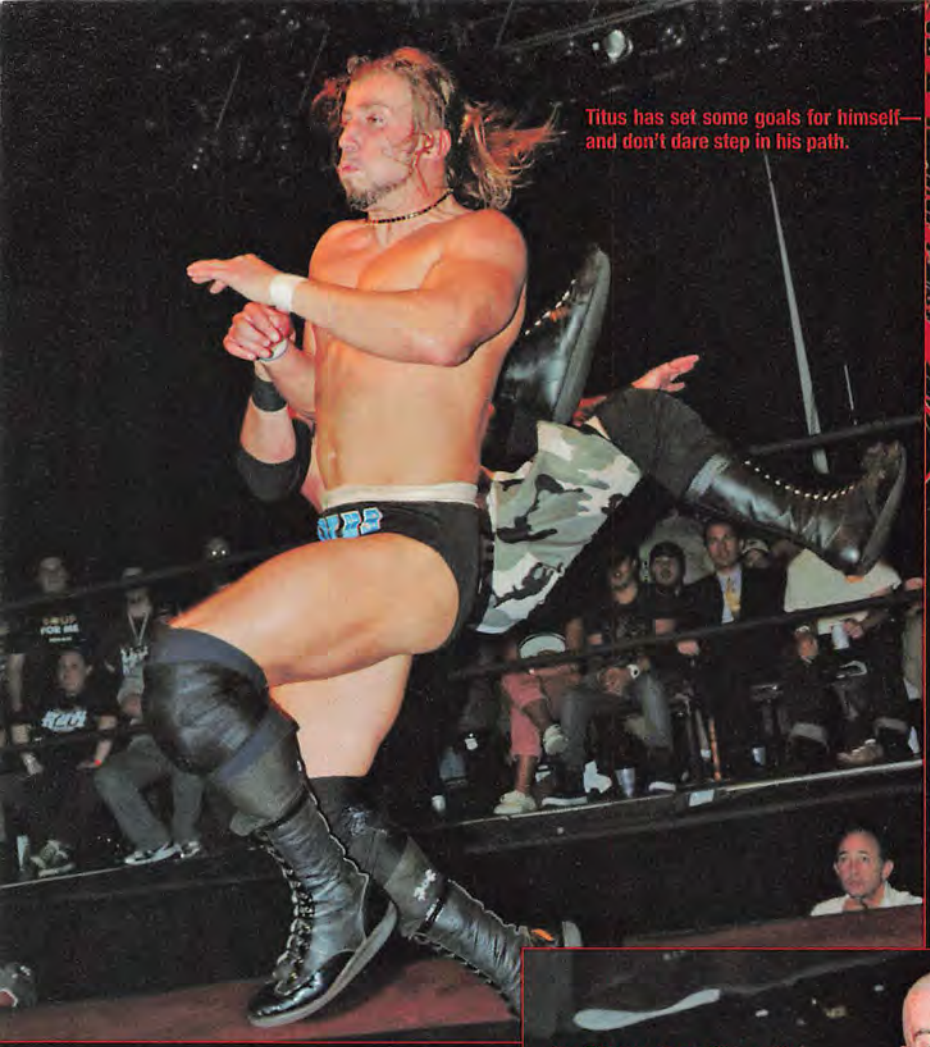
King's testimony may be hard to swallow for some fans who have come to know Titus as the tacky male stripper in the bowtie and star-shaped glasses. But those who have recently shared a wrestling ring with Titus know first-hand that there is a whole different dimension to "Rhettski The Jetski."

Perhaps nobody can attest to Titus' aggression better than two ROH competitors who are synonymous with toughness—Mark and Jay Briscoe. For months, the six-time tag team champions have been embroiled in a bitter feud with the All Night Express that has included some of the bloodiest brawls in ROH history.

And on the frontline of the war has been an unwavering Titus, who bled heavily both during an April bout with the Briscoes in Atlanta, Georgia, and again in a first blood-match with the brothers in Dearborn, Michigan, in May.

The All Night Express lost that match when the referee spotted Titus bleeding from the head—even though, on the other side of the ring, Mark Briscoe had been busted open first. The match may not have gone the Express' way, but even in defeat, Titus exhibited true grit.

"Man, I may not like that little punk, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't respect the hell out of him after what he's shown me out there," Jay Briscoe said in a telephone inter-



Titus has set some goals for himself—and don't dare step in his path.

view, while still recovering from the punishment inflicted on him by Titus. "That boy may act like a clown, but there ain't no doubt he knows what it means to 'man up.'"

That's high praise coming from a Briscoe, and it's also well earned.

Even as Titus continues to put on a show by handing out hotel room keys to the ladies on his way to the ring, he has also been working hard to improve himself in the ring each night. And every setback—including an unsuccessful tag title shot against The Kings of Wrestling in February—has only driven Titus to work even harder.

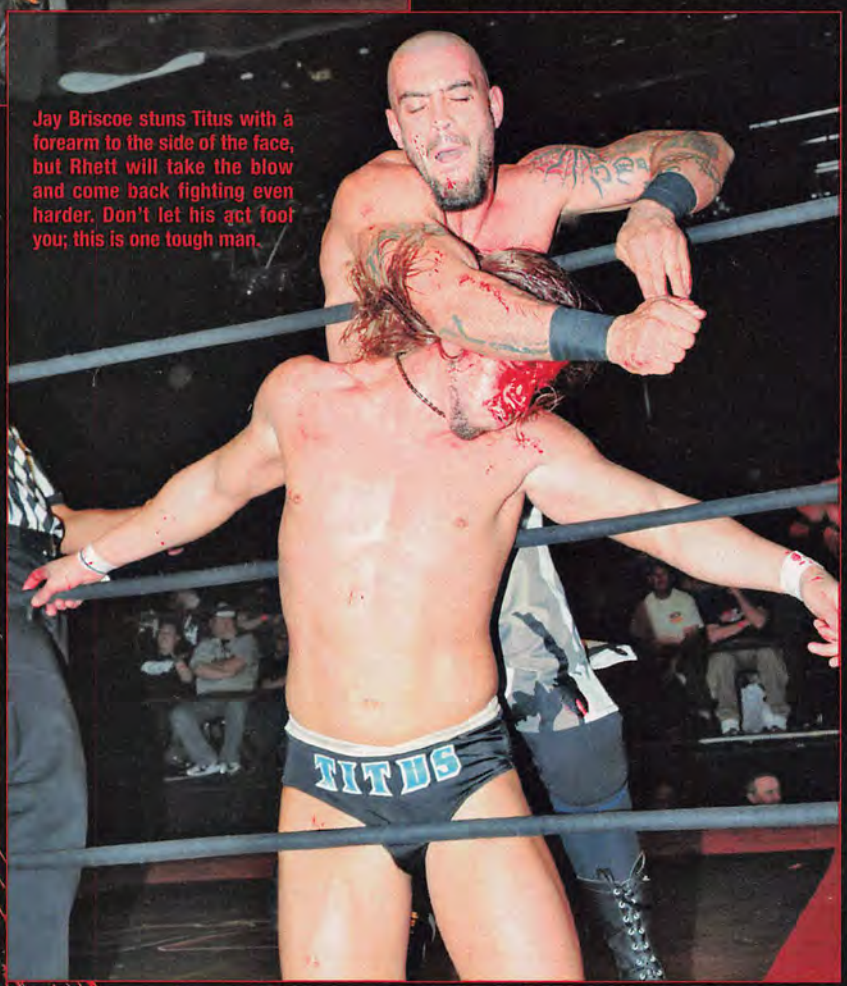
Titus, who signed a new contract with ROH in April, has sought to wrestle as much as possible, whether it's been in tag bouts with King, in singles matches against opponents including Homicide and Jay Briscoe, and for other independent promotions besides ROH, including NWA Force 1 and Full Impact Pro Wrestling.

By the spring of 2011, many of the groans that Titus had become used to hearing from fans had turned into cheers, as fans began noticing and appreciating his work ethic. But Titus insists fan approval has never motivated him.

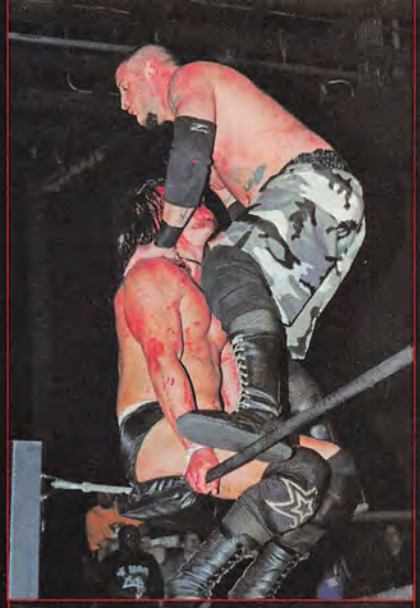
"I don't care if you boo me, but don't question my toughness," Titus said. "Sure, I like to have fun. But you need to be more than just a showman to survive in a company like Ring of Honor."

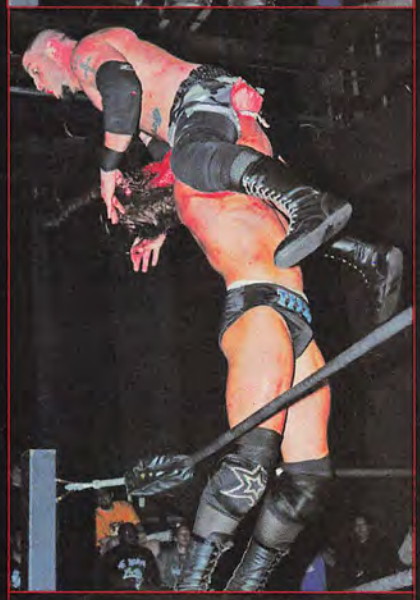
Titus, now 23, was just 17 years old when he began training in ROH's wrestling academy under the likes of Austin Aries and Daniel Bryan. He cut his teeth in the sport taking on such warriors as CM Punk and Samoa Joe, with whom Titus once survived a Singapore Cane Match.

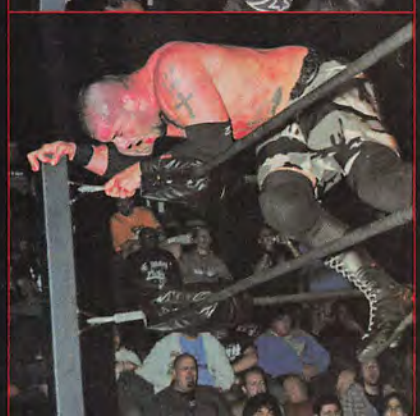
When he first became a featured act in ROH, it may have been hard for some fans to see past Titus' ridiculous antics, which included soliciting kisses from ladies at ringside and giving graphic and lewd accounts of his sexual conquests in interviews.



Jay Briscoe stuns Titus with a forearm to the side of the face, but Rhett will take the blow and come back fighting even harder. Don't let his act fool you; this is one tough man.







Jay is not fond of Titus in the least, but he's quick to say, "There ain't no doubt he knows what it means to 'man up.'" As battered as both men were in Atlanta, we're sure the feeling is mutual.

But Titus quickly showed that he had the skills to hold his own in ROH's highly competitive atmosphere. In 2008, he became the seventh, and last, wrestler to win ROH's defunct Top of the Class trophy, which recognized the standout student of ROH's training academy.

After feuding with Delirious during much of 2008, he began teaming with King and also worked closely with Aries. The alliance the former *WWE Tough Enough* finalist and the two-time ROH heavyweight champ has helped Titus raise his already impressive game.

At 6'2" and weighing 203 pounds, Titus has the right mix of height, power, and speed to be a contender in any division in which he competes. His arsenal includes a devastating crucifix power bomb and a picture-perfect top-rope frog splash.

"People think that because Rhett likes to put on a show, that he's not serious about what he does. And, the truth is, that can work to his advantage," Aries said of his former protégé. "The dancing, the flirting. It all serves to lure opponents into a false sense of security. But before you know it, Rhett's coming at you like a pitbull."

While talk of Titus' toughness may come as a revelation to some, Titus says nobody should be surprised.

"I've been at this for over five years now," he said. "And you don't get this far unless you're willing to get beat up, get bloody, and keep on pushing." □

Mark Briscoe tries to attack Titus while he's seated on the turnbuckles, but Mark has the wherewithal to use his antagonist's momentum to send him over his shoulders and crashing into the eyebolt support.

"STONE-COLD" STEVE AUSTIN

Is He "Tough Enough" For One More Match?

He watched The Rock captivate WWE upon his return. *Tough Enough* has rekindled his passion for his craft. But does Steve Austin have the desire and physical ability to make a successful in-ring comeback?

BY HARRY BURKETT

ONE LOOK AT Steve Austin's eyes and it was easy to read his mind. His gaze fixed upon The Rock, and, likewise, The Rock's eyes locked on Austin's. "It's good to see ya," said Austin, stone-coldly. Wary of what venom might be left in "The Rattlesnake," The Rock replied, "It's good to see you."

They exchanged manly pleasantries and Austin walked away.

That was the brief backstage encounter between the two old rivals at WrestleMania 27, a full 10 years after Rock defeated Austin for the WWF title at WrestleMania 17.

So what was Austin thinking? He no doubt respects The Rock, as one predator respects another. But he also had to think of the huge money that WWE was paying The Rock for this one-time guest appearance. He had to think of all the hullabaloo that was made of The Rock's return. After all, Austin had also made a fresh return to WrestleMania, as referee of the Michael Cole-Jerry Lawler match.

Yet The Rock had walked in through the front door as a big star. It seemed Austin had come in the back door and was relegated to a supporting role.

And now WrestleMania 28 looms large, and The Rock will earn even more money to wrestle one more match. That means everyone will be talking about Rock-Cena for the rest of 2011 and into 2012.

It's too much for an intense S.O.B. like Austin to take. Also fueling Austin's competitive fire is his involvement as host and judge of the revived *Tough Enough* series. Time and again, "Stone-Cold" seems eager to jump into the ring and show the young punks how it's done. But there are two likely reasons why he doesn't: One, WWE producers don't want Austin to portray himself as a mere trainer. Two, Austin's neck and spinal injuries have left him physically limited and it's just plain unwise for him to risk further injury.

Or, that's what we're led to believe. Sure, it would be silly for someone with a history of neck problems to unnecessarily expose himself to injury during a taping of *Tough Enough*, especially when Bill DeMott, Booker T, and Trish Stratus were hired specifically for that purpose. But does that mean Austin isn't tough enough to wrestle again?

Let's get one notion out of the way: We're not suggesting that Austin doesn't have the guts to wrestle again or to get in someone's face. Austin has proven his testicular fortitude countless times, most notably at SummerSlam '97 when he took Owen Hart's piledriver, sustained compressed vertebrae commonly known as a "stinger," and, ever the professional, rolled up Hart to win the Intercontinental title. Then Austin lay there motionless, not knowing whether his paralysis was temporary or permanent.

Fourteen years later, Austin still suffers the effects of that maneuver. The numbness, the tingling, and the ever-present threat of permanent paralysis resulted in Austin's quiet re-

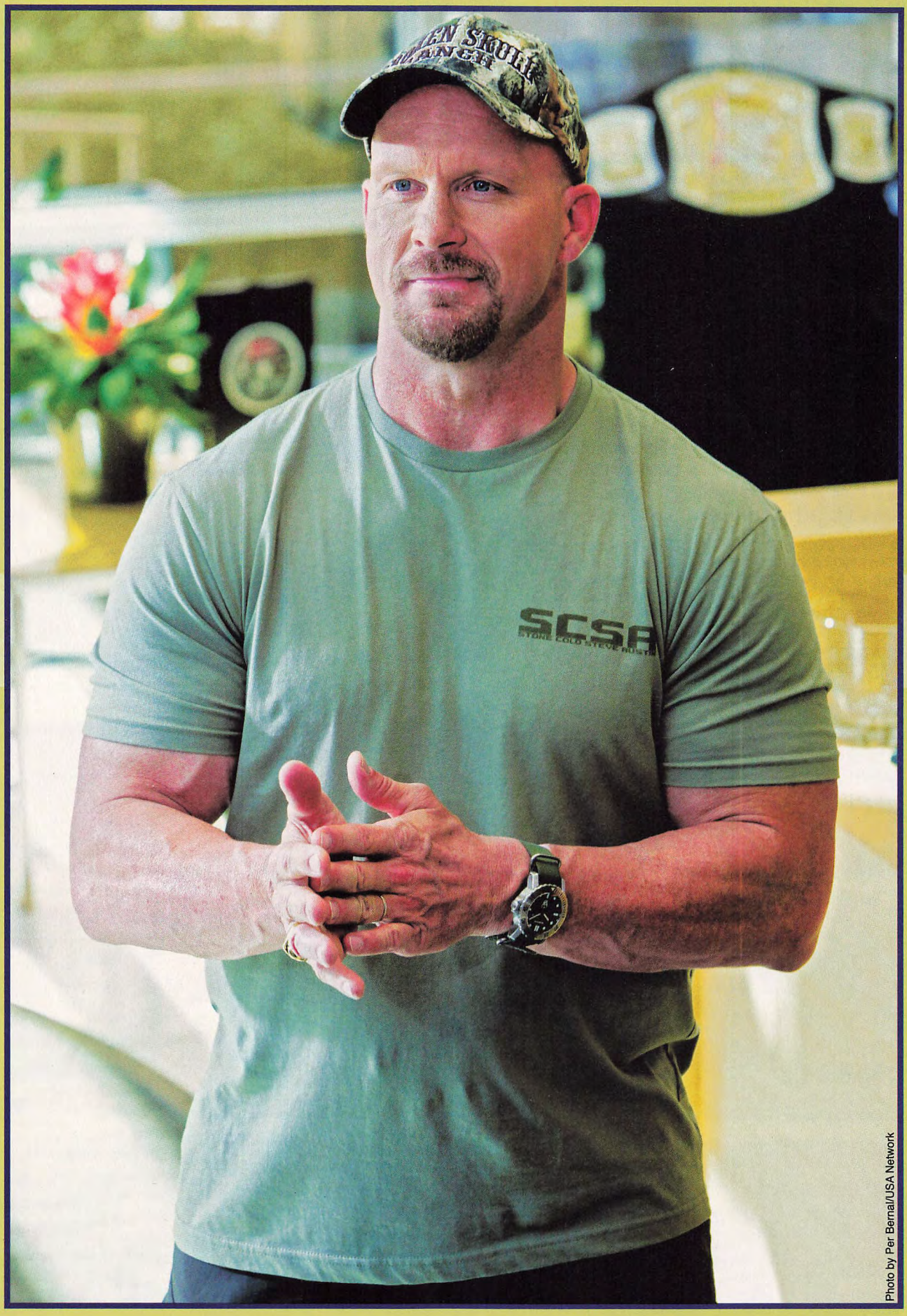


Photo by Per Bernal/USA Network

tirement nearly a decade ago. And we say "quiet" retirement because there was no tearful goodbye on *Raw*, no WWE press release, and no official confirmation of a retirement.

Austin simply walked out of WWE in 2002, reportedly because of a creative dispute. Years later, Austin revealed that nagging injuries and his inability to compete at a peak level were greater factors in his walkout.

But he never announced a retirement. Part of him didn't want to admit it was over.

Perhaps, deep down, Austin, now 46, didn't believe it was over.

When Austin introduced this season's contestants for *Tough Enough* on the edition of *Raw* immediately following WrestleMania, he was interrupted by then-WWE champ The Miz, who couldn't resist taunting the legend.

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking? Do you think you have one more run? I bet you think you're tough enough." The *TE* con-

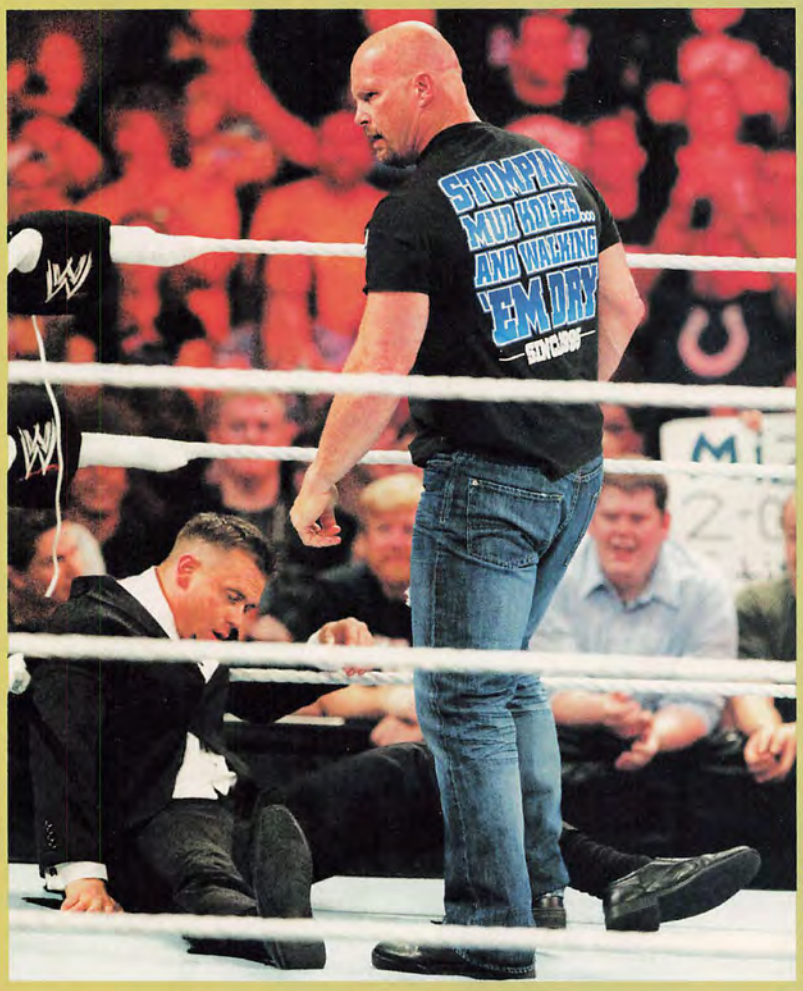
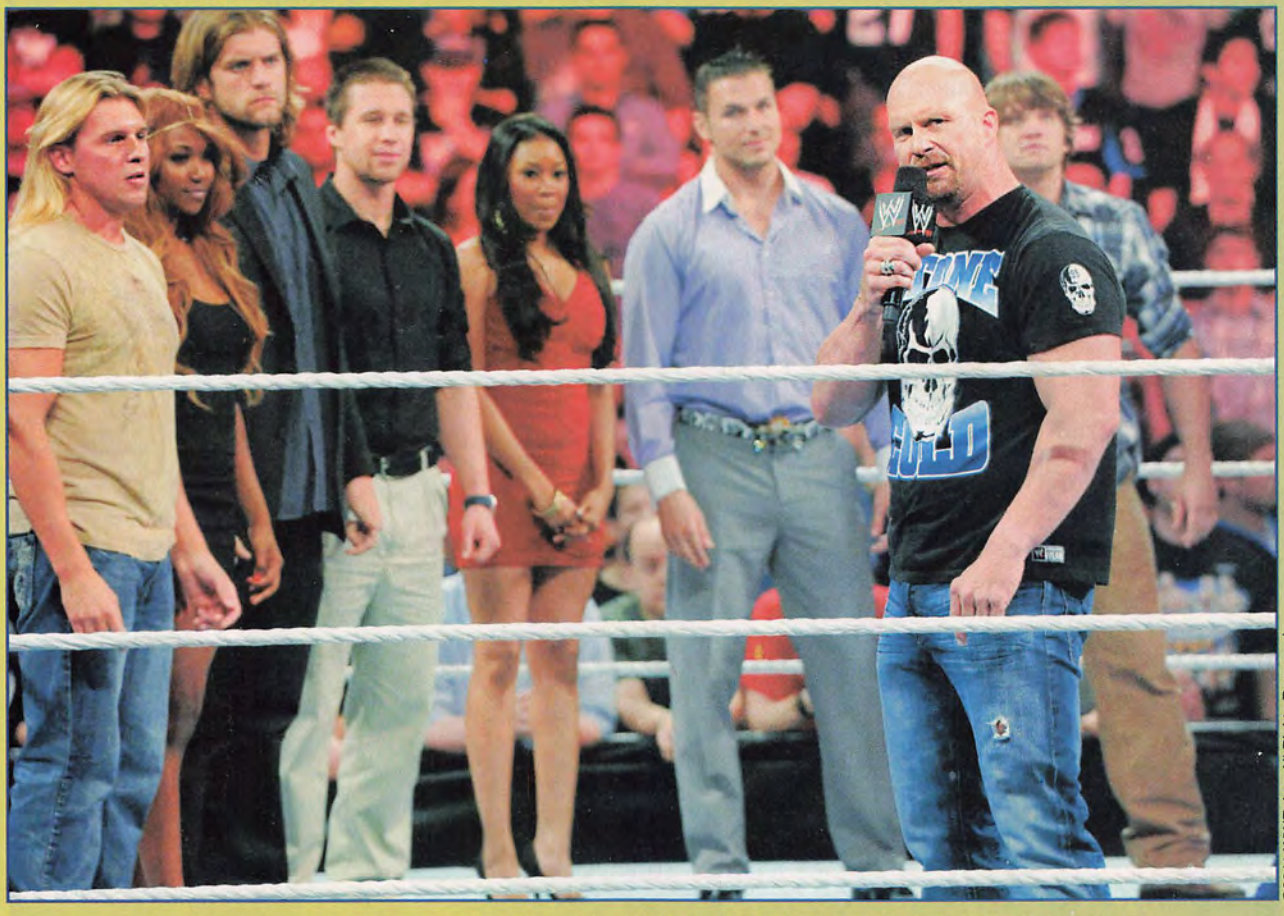


Photo by Matt Roberts

It seems every time Austin returns to WWE, he can't resist getting physically involved with a current wrestler, whether it's Jack Swagger at WrestleMania 27 (below) or Alex Riley the following night (right). Perhaps "Stone-Cold" has an itch only full-time competition can scratch.

Photo by George Napolitano

Though they've been more enemies than friends over the years, The Rock's early-2011 return might have sparked something in Austin's mind.



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"Stone-Cold" assembled his *Tough Enough* trainees for a field trip to *Raw* in early-spring. Could it be that working so closely with the young hopefuls has inspired Austin's desire to compete in the squared-circle once more?

testants cleared the ring, and Austin was jumped by The Miz' cohort, Alex Riley. Austin didn't just fight back; he retaliated in top wrestling form, stomping a mudhole into Riley in the corner, ducking a clothesline, and planting him with a Lou Thesz press. Even Booker T, who was sitting in on commentary, enthused that Austin had not just one more match left in him, but one more run.

Chants of "one more match" have followed Austin ever since he last

stepped in the ring. It happened at the 2005 WWE Hall of Fame ceremony when new inductee Hulk Hogan remarked that he wanted to wrestle Austin, and it happened again during Austin's own induction four years later.

And for all the excitement that The Rock brings to his slow-speed rivalry with Cena, wouldn't it be all the more entertaining if it were "Stone-Cold" asking "Fruity Pebbles" why his mother still dresses him? There would be a degree of

FIVE OPPONENTS

"THE RATTLESNAKE" WOULD STRIKE FIRST

If Steve Austin makes a comeback, don't expect it to be the typical "hungry-youngster-targets-the-vulnerable-veteran" storyline. This won't be The Nexus going after Rick Steamboat like a pack of wild dogs. This won't be Randy Orton kicking Mick Foley down a stairwell. Austin will not exploit his age to gain any sort of sympathy from the fans. He will run at full-throttle, just like "Stone-Cold" of the late-'90s or at least close to it. That means his crosshairs will be fixed upon some of WWE's top stars.

John Cena: Picture this. The Rock does the right thing by losing to Cena at WrestleMania 28, and special referee Steve Austin hits Cena with the Stunner, thereby showing-up Cena and Rock at the same time! Cena would have no choice but to turn heel if this turned out to be a week-to-week feud. And would Austin do the right thing at WrestleMania 29? We're not so sure.

Randy Orton: "The Viper" is an anti-hero, just like "Stone-Cold," but Orton is without humor and doesn't seem to care about the support of the fans. A heel turn is always within easy reach for Orton, and he is the only WWE star who has the credibility—and sheer viciousness—to make fans fear for Austin's health. Orton would offer the pure physicality that Austin craves.

The Miz: He was obnoxious when he possessed the WWE title. But he's downright dangerous without it, because if he can't have the belt, he can at least have a victim—and ending Austin's career would be an even greater coup than beating Cena for the championship. With Miz, Austin would have flashbacks of bouncing Shane McMahon around the ring.

CM Punk: Austin and Punk had a recent fun war of words on Twitter regarding the new *WWE All-Stars* video game. "Stone-Cold," in his interview with Xfinity, said he regarded Punk as a top worker and appreciated his no-nonsense ring style and promos. With Austin, one has to gain his respect to gain his attention. And a feud with Austin might be enough to entice Punk to remain in WWE.

R-Truth: He's the loudest rebel in WWE right now, even accusing stars such as John Cena and Bret Hart of being corporate pets. The old rebel in Austin has to appreciate that, and one can only imagine the quality of the promos between these two. And any feud with R-Truth would guarantee some light-hearted moments, probably a tad better than his beer-drinking contest with JBL.

Austin has a score to settle with Orton that dates back to CyberSunday 2008

Photo by George Napolitano

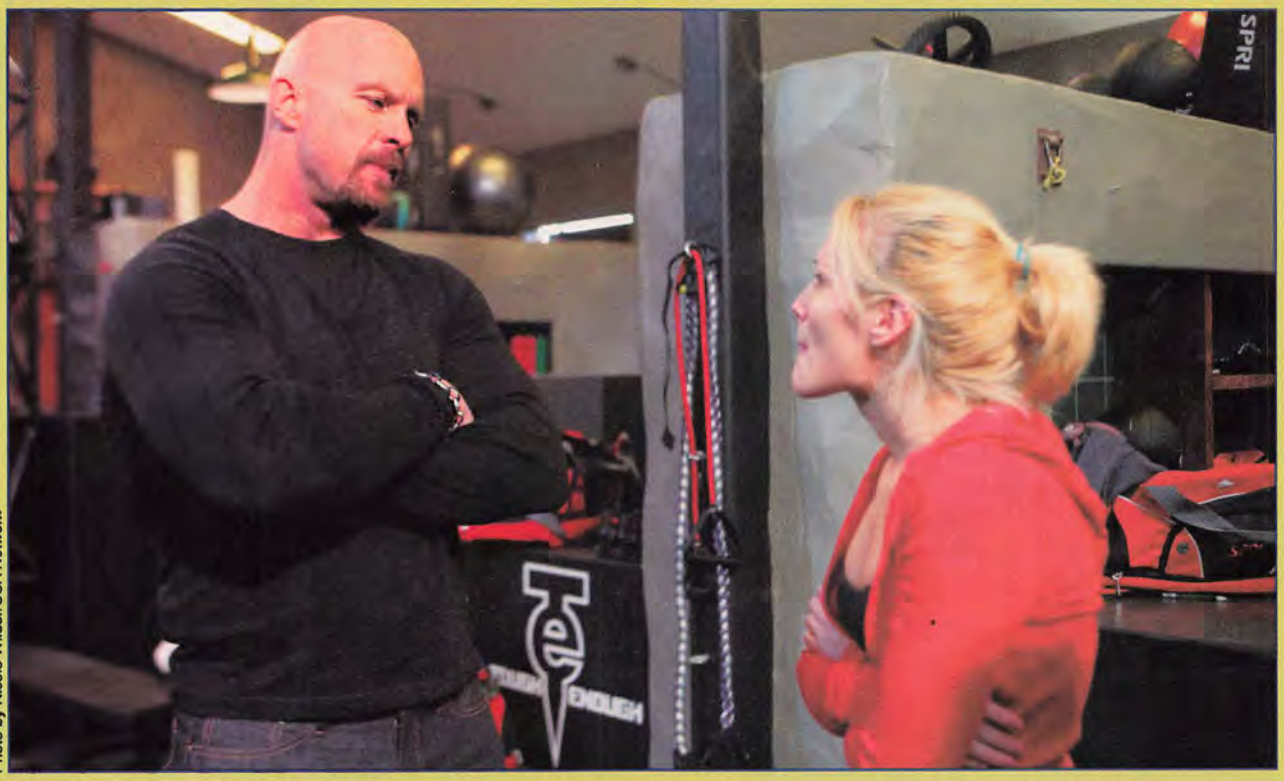

Photo by Nicole Wilder/USA Network

While his trainer/judge role on *Tough Enough* may have rekindled the desire to wrestle again, it has also revealed a soft side of Austin, shown here giving feedback to contestant Ivelisse Velez. Does Steve Austin still have the gravel in his gut to be "Stone-Cold" again?

raw emotion in an Austin-Cena feud that the Rock-Cena rivalry will never achieve.

Stomping a mudhole in Cena and walking it dry? That would be pure gold for all the Cena-haters out there.

Is Austin physically capable of wrestling a quality match? After witnessing the Shawn Michaels miracle comeback, fans have been conditioned to believe that anything is possible. Austin doesn't have a steel rod in his back, but he has suffered from bad knees since his WCW days in the early-1990s, was diagnosed with spinal shock syndrome after Owen Hart's piledriver, and underwent the same vertebrae-fusion surgery as Edge, Rhyno, and Lita.

But Austin has had something that few other wrestlers allow themselves to enjoy: nine years to rest his aching joints and weary bones. Time is the greatest healer, and Austin has preoccupied himself with a respectable film career and plenty of deer and duck hunting ... and lots of beer.

Austin's friend, Jim Ross, has usually stopped short of saying "Stone-Cold" is physically incapable of performing, instead saying that Austin would want to do plenty of training before any comeback and that he was happy with his film career nonetheless.

In an interview posted on Comcast's Xfinity website on April 7, Austin gave the strongest indication yet that an in-ring return was possible. He even discussed whom he would like to face.

"The dream match that never happened in a lot of people's minds is Austin-Hogan," said the six-time WWF World champion. "But, in the current crop? I don't really know. It would have been neat to work against John Cena. Or The Rock or Undertaker or Triple-H again. But that one dream match that never happened was Austin-Hogan. I could still, you know if I was in a bad situation, I could still get two years out of my carcass on a full-time basis."

That's a powerful statement. Austin suggests that he has not just one more match left in him, but two years of matches left in him. But he added this obligatory line:

"But I'm happy where I'm at. And in 10 or 20 years I still want to be doing the things I'm doing with my hunting and fishing. I want to continue to do that in a pain-free fashion. And right now, I'm living a pretty pain-free lifestyle."

We know Austin has the guts and he may even have the physical ability. But would his head be in the game? Does he have the fire in the belly? Has he gone soft?

After all, Austin has shown a never-before-revealed tender side on *Tough Enough*. Remember when Donny Osmond look-alike Martin Casaus was eliminated due to a freak ankle injury? Austin invited Martin to his office, like Ward Cleaver calling The Beaver to his study, and had a soft-spoken chat with Martin, reminiscing about his neck injury and his own challenges in the wrestling industry. We also saw Austin's human side with contestants such as Jeremiah Riggs and Christina Crawford.

Before *Tough Enough*, no one had ever seen "Stone-Cold" with a tear in his eye. Now everyone has seen it, including The Miz, Alberto Del Rio, Wade Barrett, and the rest of WWE's dangerous up-and-comers. The aura of absolute ruthlessness is gone.

It certainly doesn't seem as unlikely that we will see the legendary Austin in the ring soon—as it once might have. Would it be a kinder Austin? Maybe. Would it be a wiser Austin? Definitely. Most importantly, judging from everything we know about Austin's intestinal fortitude and track record, would Austin be tough enough?

Hell, yeah. □

THE X DIVISION FALLS INTO THE GREAT ABYSS

What TNA Must Do To Bring It Back

A few years ago, TNA's X division was regarded as one of the most exciting and competitive in all of wrestling. But now its future looks grim. Here's how TNA can make the X division special again

BY BILL MELTZER
PHOTOS BY LEE SOUTH/TNA WRESTLING

ONE OF THE most compelling facets of TNA Wrestling over the course of its nine-year history has been the X division. It was in the X division's high-energy, daredevil bouts between cruiserweight competitors that the product truly lived up to its Total Nonstop Action moniker. Now, in the wake of Abyss capturing the X division belt from five-time champion Kazarian, the X division seems to be in danger of going the way of the company's six-sided ring.

Some would argue that the X division lost its distinctive identity years ago. Created as a means to showcase smaller but immensely skilled and acrobatic wrestlers, the early years of the division were dominated by the likes of AJ Styles, Christopher Daniels, Jerry Lynn, Chris Sabin, Amazing Red, Petey Williams, Kazarian, and Senshi. For a time, some even believed the X division was on the brink of surpassing the TNA heavyweight ranks in popularity. At the very least, the X division helped TNA establish a brand identity that differentiated itself from WWE.

Kazarian (opposite page) seemed to be on his way to reestablishing the credibility of the X division title when he was picked off by Abyss (left).

Both Samoa Joe and Abyss are better suited to wrestling each other as well as other heavyweights. They deprive the X division of its identity when they compete against X division wrestlers who can't match their size.

Though he enjoyed an agility advantage, former X division champion Kazarian couldn't match the power and ferocity of Abyss when they met on *Impact Wrestling*, prompting many to wonder what Abyss was even doing in an X division match.

And then Kevin Nash and Samoa Joe came to the X division.

It took a long time to rebuild the credibility lost when Nash publicly deemed the X division bouts on *Impact* to be "basically filler" and then proceeded to feud with Chris Sabin and other members of the X division, mocking them at every turn by doing things such as wrestling against midgets and claiming that he'd invented an "840-degree splash" to top the acrobatics seen in the X division.

Meanwhile, while Samoa Joe held credibility as a legitimately tough and fearsome competitor from his years in Ring of Honor and the indy scene, he held a tremendous size advantage over anyone he faced in the X division. His style in the ring clashed with the established X division style. Most damagingly of all, while Joe was dominating the X division, he simultaneously competed as a heavyweight and made no bones about the fact that his ultimate goal was winning the World championship.

By the time Joe won the X division title for the third time and then lost it (along with a half-share of the tag team championship belt) to defending TNA World champion Kurt Angle in 2007, the lines between the X division and the "main" roster had become blurred. Wrestlers such as Styles routinely crossed over from one division to the other and the X division title was in danger of becoming just another secondary championship.

More recently, however, the X division started to regain its stalled momentum. While the X division matches were not quite as prominent on *Impact* as they had been in the early-2000s, they were often among the best on any given *Impact* episode, pay-per-view event, or house show. Brian Kendrick, Amazing Red, and Kazarian in particular helped restore some of the division's distinctive appeal, although there were still crossover feuds and matches.

Kazarian's most recent X division title reign, spanning 127 days, was the longest reign in three years and the seventh longest in the championship's history. His reign added stability to the division. In a bracket that had become known for its frequent title changes and slapdash booking, Kazarian brought order.

He seemed to be well on his way to challenging Christopher Daniels' record 182-day run when Abyss brought his reign to a screeching halt and threw the X division back into chaos in the process.

"I do feel a sense of ownership in the X division, and for good reason," Kazarian said shortly before the title loss. "I don't think it's bragging to say that I know what the X division style is all about. I think I've helped remind people of why the X division mattered so much in the first place. My blood and

To make the X division viable, TNA might consider enforcing a weight requirement that limits wrestlers to 230 pounds. That way, wrestlers such as Kazarian and Max and Jeremy Buck can compete on a level playing field that allows them to better showcase their skills.

my sweat have gone into making this title mean something again."

When asked if men such as Abyss and Samoa Joe have any business even wrestling for the X division title, Kazarian answered in the affirmative.

"Absolutely," he said, "and I would rather it be in title matches instead of non-title matches. I'm not a little guy (6'1", 215 pounds) and I know how to handle myself even when I'm giving up size."

Kazarian's fighting spirit is admirable, but unfortunately, it proved to be his undoing—which is exactly why some say Abyss shouldn't have been allowed to compete for the X division title in the first place. Even more than Samoa Joe, the 6'8", 350-pound Abyss is the physical and stylistic antithesis of why the X division was created. It could even be argued that Abyss' title victory is to the X division what the title reigns of The Big Show and Mark Henry were to the WWE version of the ECW championship: a repudiation of the title's original intent.

Moving forward, if TNA is serious about maintaining a competitive X division that stands apart from the rest of the company, there needs to be controls put in place to ensure the division exists not as afterthought for current mid-card wrestlers who are outside the TNA World championship picture, but as a showcase for high-flying cruiserweights.

When the X division was rolled out, it had a tag line to differentiate itself from the standard cruiserweight divisions of the past: "It's not about weight limits; it's about no limits." It's a clever slogan for sure, but it fails to set concrete criteria for participation. It's time to set a strict weight limit of, say, 230 pounds. By the nature of this sport, wrestlers who fall into that weight class have to have the requisite skills to maintain the standard of excellence that the X division should represent.

Also, in order to restore the X division title's former visibility, the belt should be defended at least twice per month on *Impact Wrestling* broadcasts. Otherwise, the wrestlers who make up the division are cast as a gaggle of B-level cruiserweights that will never rise to the top of the card because they can't compete with the heavyweights.

Finally, the division needs stability, and that's something that will not be achieved by having the title on the line in multi-wrestler matches. We acknowledge that these matches—particularly when involving X division wrestlers—have their place, so we offer the following: The X division titles can change hands in multi-wrestler matches *only* if the champion is pinned or submits. If a participant scores the win over someone other than the champion, the title would not change hands. However, the champion would be required to grant a one-on-one title match to the winner within 30 days.

With all due respect to men like Abyss and Samoa Joe, they must be kept out of the X division, and away from the X division title so that Kazarian and his ilk have something to compete for and aspire to.

Without these guidelines, the X division loses its identity and meaning. What would be the point of even having an X division if it means nothing? □

THE WRESTLING ANALYST

KANE

Years Pro:	19
Size:	7', 323
"*PWI* 500" Listings:	2010: 79
	2009: 37
	2008: 33
	2007: 65
	2006: 50
	2005: 19
	2004: 13
	2003: 23
	2002: 55
	2001: 16
	2000: 34
	1999: 13
	1998: 21
	1997: 175
Titles:	WWE World championship
	WWE heavyweight championship
	WWE World tag team
	WCW World tag team
	WWF Hardcore
PWI Awards:	Tag Team of the Year (1999)

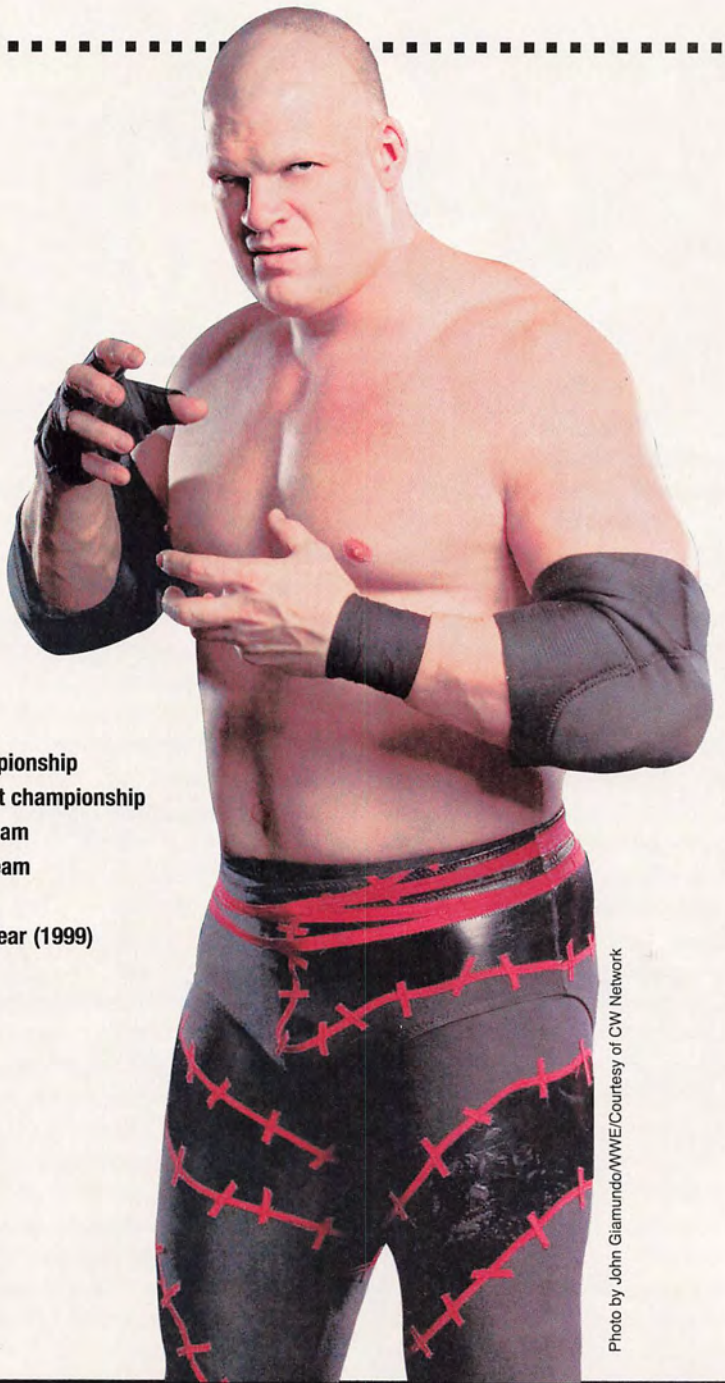

Photo by John Giamundo/WWE/Courtesy of CW Network

THE NUMBERS

OFFENSE (9.0): There may not be another wrestler in WWE who enjoys dishing out pain to an opponent quite as much as Kane. His lust for violence has yet to be satiated after all these years, and he still packs a lot of power in every move. With his height, reach, and leverage advantage over most rivals, it is tough to escape Kane's clutches. He doesn't need to do anything fancy. His style is basic and brutal.

DEFENSE (6.5): Sometimes it seems as if Kane enjoys receiving punishment almost as much as likes doling it out. He has never been much for slick reversals and counters. Kane is willing to take two shots for every one he lands. His unwillingness to wrestle defensively has cost him many matches over the years.

EXPERIENCE (9.5): There are few active wrestlers who have seen and done as much as Kane over the course of his career. He's wrestled main events, opening matches, and everything in between. He's been successful both as a solo competitor and tag team member. He's a master of fiery specialty matches, has been among the most feared and hated figures on the scene for years, and even had fairly successful runs as an oddly sympathetic fan favorite.

CONDITIONING (9.0): Unlike many of the wrestling game's big men, Kane is a natural athlete. The former basketball and football star at Northeast Missouri State has always kept himself in good cardiovascular shape. Although he has never had a bodybuilder's physique, he has kept his huge frame muscular and lean.

STAMINA (8.0): Kane does not get worn down nearly as quickly as some other big men, but no one would ever confuse him with Kurt Angle or a prime Ric Flair in the stamina department. Few of his matches go longer than 10 minutes, and while he has the conditioning to wrestle longer if necessary, his tendency to absorb punishment eventually starts to work against him.

SCIENCE (7.0): Unless you consider psyching out opponents a form of science, scientific wrestling moves make only sporadic appearances in Kane's repertoire. Chokeslams, power bombs, punches, kicks, and clotheslines have always been his bread and butter. He's not about to change now.

POWER (10.0): At 7', 323 pounds, Kane is all about brute force and leverage. Once he lifts an opponent, something devastating almost always follows. He often dominates smaller rivals with one-armed power moves. Even his biggest and strongest opponents are in major trouble when Kane grabs them in a chokehold with his arm extended.

SPEED (7.0): Kane is not your traditional ponderous superheavyweight. He has underrated mobility in the ring but rarely employs it (which is part of the reason The Undertaker has won more consistently than his half-brother). Kane prefers to move straight ahead.

ABILITY TO ABSORB PUNISHMENT (9.5): Kane is nearly as masochistic as he is sadistic. His face sometimes breaks into a smile when he's on the receiving end of heavy shots. While this works to his detriment the longer a match goes, Kane often absorbs flurries of punishment in a short period of time and merely shrugs it off.

QUALITY OF OPPOSITION (9.5): There are few WWE wrestlers who haven't gone up against "The Big Red Machine" at some point over the past 15 years. For someone with his tools and experience, the big man's win-loss record in headline and semi-main-event matches is rather modest. But he'll take on any established star or up-and-comer without hesitation.

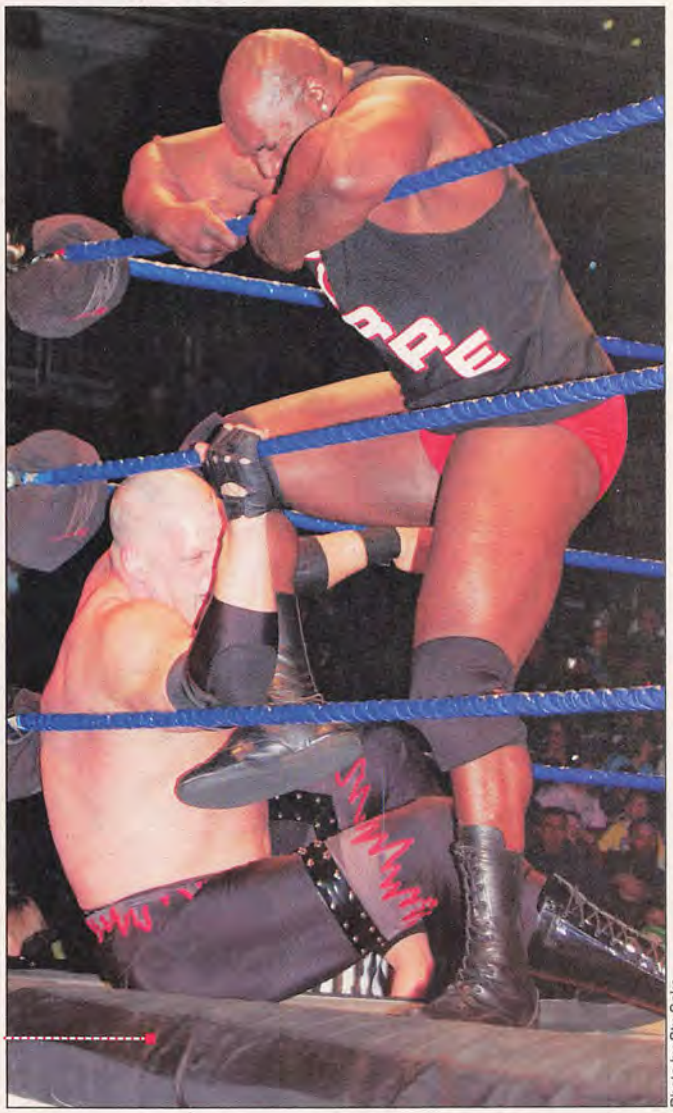

Photo by Stu Saks

① **Ezekiel Jackson is a big man who can do a lot of damage in the ring. But Kane's ability to absorb punishment is second to none. Though Jackson has Kane down, it won't be for long.**

Photo by George Napolitano

② When Kane lifts an opponent into the air, bad things are sure to follow. Alberto Del Rio knows first-hand just how painful a Kane chokeslam can be.

Photo by George Napolitano

③ Kane's Tombstone piledriver is one of the most feared and dependable finishers in all of wrestling. Even the mercurial Rey Mysterio is unlikely to kick out of a pin attempt after taking a Tombstone.

THE Wrestling ANALYST

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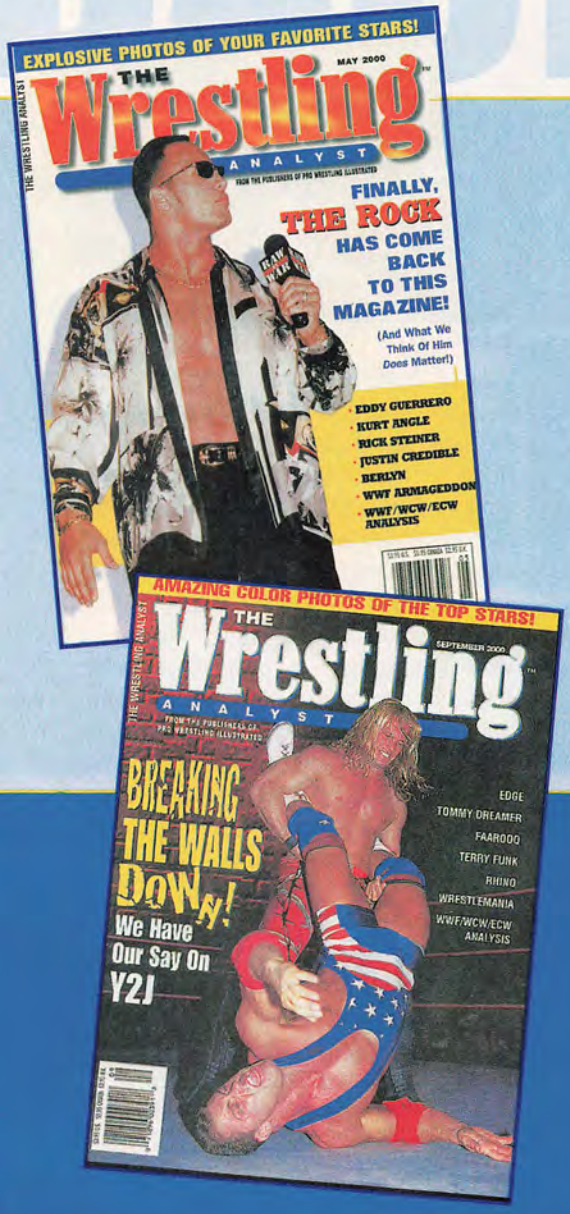

- ☐ **May 1998:** Shawn Michaels, Ken Shamrock, Dallas Page, Vader, Steiners, Sabu, Cactus Jack.
- ☐ **Sept. 1998:** Steve Austin, Booker T., Kane, Bam Bam Bigelow, Scott Norton, Perry Saturn, Tom Brandi, WrestleMania XIV.
- ☐ **Nov. 1998:** Bill Goldberg, Eddie Guerrero, Mark Mero, Headbangers, Brian Christopher, Lance Storm, D-Lo Brown, Bash at the Beach.
- ☐ **Jan. 1999:** Owen Hart , Bret Hart, Jeff Jarrett, Disco Inferno, Taka Michinoku, Chris Candido, Fit Finlay, SummerSlam.
- ☐ **March 1999:** New Age Outlaws, Mark Henry, The Giant, D.O.A., 2 Cold Scorpio, Tracy Smothers, Halloween Havoc.
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- ☐ **July 1999:** Vince McMahon, Dudleys, Billy Kidman, Goldust, Konnan, Dan Severn, Valentine's Day Massacre, WWF-WCW-ECW.
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- ☐ **Nov. 1999:** Sting, Godfather, Super Crazy, Darren Drozdov, Horace Hogan, Great American Bash, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **Jan. 2000:** Hulk Hogan, Steve Austin, Bruno Sammartino, Bob Backlund, Bret Hart, Shawn Michaels, Pedro Morales, Randy Savage.
- ☐ **March 2000:** Chyna, Sid Vicious, Steve Blackman, Yoshihiro Tajiri, Barry Windham, Unforgiven, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **May 2000:** The Rock, Eddie Guerrero, Kurt Angle, Rick Steiner, Justin Credible, Berlyn, Armageddon, WWF-WCW-ECW.
- ☐ **July 2000:** Rikishi, Test, Madusa, Mike Awesome, Meng, Albert, Royal Rumble, WWF-WCW-ECW.
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THE ANALYSIS

REPERTOIRE: Kane is a brawler and a power wrestler. Always has been, always will be. While he will occasionally go up to the top rope to deliver a flying clothesline, Kane usually prefers to keep both feet firmly planted on the mat. His chokeslam is one of the most devastating in the business and he can deliver a fearsome Tombstone piledriver.

STRENGTHS: There is a method to Kane's madness. A highly educated man away from the ring, Kane is a master of intimidation and psychological tactics. Even the most confident opponents shudder at the thought of what he has in store for them. Win or lose, Kane rarely fails to take his pound of flesh.

WEAKNESSES: Kane doesn't offer a lot of variety in his attack in the ring. Unlike The Undertaker, who has constantly refined and added to his repertoire over the years, Kane's style has barely changed. A patient opponent can wait for an opening, and then strike quickly to score a winning pinfall.

④ **Hardly an aerialist, Kane goes to the air only on rare occasions, mainly to add some pop to his already devastating clothesline.**

Photo by George Napolitano

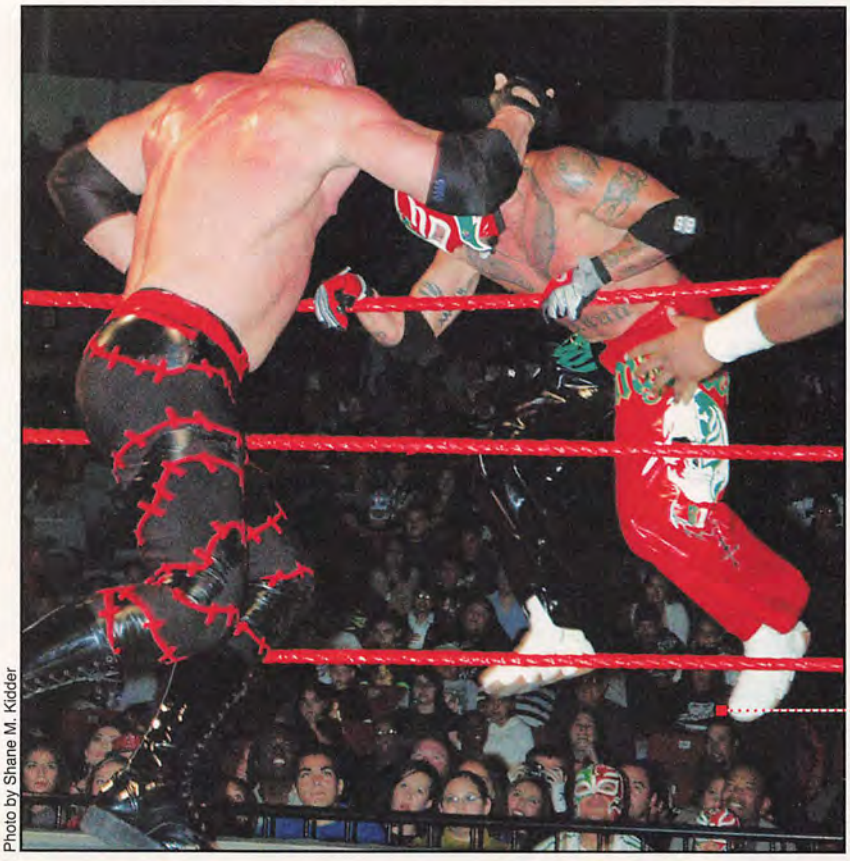

Photo by Shane M. Kidder

DEFINING CAREER MOMENT: On July 18, 2010, Kane won the Money in the Bank ladder match at the pay-per-view of the same name. Later that night, he cashed in his briefcase and defeated World champion Rey Mysterio to win the title—and silence critics who said he was incapable of becoming champion. Kane defended the title for nearly five months before losing to Edge.

FUTURE: At age 44, time is starting to work against Kane. It seems unlikely that a third world championship is in his future. Then again, few would have predicted his second title win, his 154-day reign (the longest run since Batista's first title reign in 2005-2006). Recently, Kane reformed a tag team with The Big Show, with whom he co-held one of his nine WWE tag team championships. The WWE tag team scene is exceptionally weak at the moment, so it is not out of the question that the pair could win another title together. □

⑤ **Kane is not an effective defensive wrestler, and his counters usually consist of pulverizing strikes and kicks. At his size, though, Kane is comfortable relying on a power-based approach, especially against smaller foes like Mysterio.**

2 MAGAZINES IN 1!

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Vol. 30, 2009: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "His Mojo's Rising: John Morrison's Plan To Sneak To The Top." 90-Minute Interview: Ron Simmons. **Also Inside:** Matt Morgan, Blue Demon. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Cody vs. Ted: Who Has The Lead In The Race To Superstardom?" **Also Inside:** Rick Steamboat, Samoa Joe, Turnbuckle Turkeys.

Vol. 31, 2010: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "TNA World Champion A.J. Styles: The Untold Story Of How Sting Saved His Career." 90-Minute Interview: Ivan Koloff. Also Inside: Danielson & McGuinness, Rey Mysterio Jr. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Hot WrestleMania Rumor! John Cena vs. The Rock." Also Inside: The Undertaker, What's Ahead For 2010.

Vol. 32, 2010: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Kofi Break! A-Level Performances Validate WWE's Faith." 90-Minute Interview: Jimmy Snuka. **Also Inside:** Umaga, Hart Dynasty. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Dead Man Walking: This Grueling Reign Could Bury 'Taker's Career!" **Also Inside:** Scott Steiner, Rey Mysterio Jr., Consequences Creed.

Vol. 33, 2010: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "How Ric Flair *Whoooaed* AJ Styles … How Sting Will Get Him Back." 90-Minute Interview: Rick Martel. **Also Inside:** Hornswoggle, Davey Richards, The Hardys. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "Heart-Broken Kid: Shawn Tried To Be Nice … Now He Has To Be Himself." **Also Inside:** C.M. Punk, D'Angelo Dinero, body parts challenge.

Vol. 34, 2010: Cover Story—*The Wrestler:* "Trish Stratus Reveals All: 90 Minutes Of Hot Stuff From The Hottest Diva Ever!" **Also Inside:** Hardy-RVD, D-X, Rod Strong. **Cover Story—*Inside Wrestling:*** "He'll Never Admit It … But Randy Orton Needs Your Cheers." **Also Inside:** WrestleMania 26, Matt Morgan, Eric Young.

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OFFICIAL RATINGS

TOP 10

1 JOHN CENA
240, West Newbury, MA
(1) WWE heavyweight champion

2 STING
255, Venice Beach, CA
(2) TNA World champion

3 RANDY ORTON
245, St. Louis, MO
(3) WWE World champion

4 R-TRUTH
230, Cleveland, OH
(–) No. 1 contender WWE heavyweight title

5 ROB VAN DAM
237, Los Angeles, CA
(–) No. 1 contender TNA World title

6 HIROSHI TANAHASHI
230, Ogaki, Japan
(5) IWGP heavyweight champion

7 ULTIMO GUERRERO
210, Gomez Palacio, Mex.
(4) CMLL champion

8 EDDIE EDWARDS
214, Boston, MA
(7) Ring of Honor heavyweight champion

9 SHEAMUS
280, Dublin, Ireland
(–) No. 1 contender WWE World title

10 CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
237, Los Angeles, CA
(10) No. 1 contender ROH title

Photo by George Napolitano

R-TRUTH

TAG TEAMS

1 ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM
Combined weight: 470 pounds
(1) TNA World tag team champions

2 DAVID OTUNGA & MICHAEL McGILLICUTTY
Combined weight: 474 pounds
(–) WWE tag team champions

3 CHARLIE HAAS & SHELTON BENJAMIN
Combined weight: 497 pounds
(2) ROH tag team champions

4 CHRIS HERO & CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
Combined weight: 475 pounds
(5) No. 1 contenders ROH tag team title

5 KANE & THE BIG SHOW
Combined weight: 808 pounds
(4) No. 1 contenders WWE World tag team title

6 JESSE NEAL & SHANNON MOORE
Combined weight: 433 pounds
(–) No. 1 contenders TNA World tag team title

7 BIG E LANGSTON & CALVIN RAINES
Combined weight: 549 pounds
(–) FCW tag team champions

8 JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS
Combined weight: 449 pounds
(8) NWA tag team champions

9 MASATO YOSHINO & PAC
Combined weight: 331 pounds
(3) DGUSA Open the United Gate champions

10 JOE DOERING & KONO
Combined weight: 526 pounds
(7) AJPW Unified tag team champions

RAW

WWE Champion:
JOHN CENA
(C) 240, West Newberry, MA

1—R-TRUTH
(7) 235, Charlotte, NC

2—THE MIZ
(1) 231, Cleveland, Ohio

3—ALBERTO DEL RIO
(2) 240, San Luis Potosi, Mexico

4—KOFI KINGSTON
(3) 221, Ghana, West Africa

5—DOLPH ZIGGLER
(5) 221, Hollywood, CA

6—REY MYSTERIO JR.
(9) 175, San Diego, CA

7—CM PUNK
(4) 222, Chicago, IL

8—JOHN MORRISON
(6) 223, Los Angeles, CA

9—THE BIG SHOW
(8) 485, Tampa, FL

10—SANTINO MARELLA
(–) 227, Milan, Italy

SMACKDOWN

World Champion:
RANDY ORTON
(C) 245, St. Louis, MO

1—SHEAMUS
(3) 280, Dublin, Ireland

2—CHRISTIAN
(1) 240, Toronto, ON

3—WADE BARRETT
(2) 265, Manchester, England

4—KANE
(5) 323, Hell

5—CODY RHODES
(4) 223, Marietta, GA

6—DANIEL BRYAN
(6) 190, Aberdeen, WA

7—SIN CARA
(7) 196, Mexico City, Mexico

8—DREW McINTYRE
(8) 252, Ayr, Scotland

9—MARK HENRY
(9) 392, Silsbee, TX

10—CHRIS MASTERS
(–) 265 Los Angeles, CA

TNA

World Champion:
STING
(–) 255, Venice Beach, CA

1—ROB VAN DAM
(1) 237, Los Angeles, CA

2—MR. ANDERSON
(2) 243, Green Bay, WI

3—KURT ANGLE
(3) 240, Pittsburgh, PA

4—JEFF JARRETT
(4) 235, Nashville, TN

5—MATT MORGAN
(5) 310, Fairfield, CT

6—AJ STYLES
(–) 215, Gainesville, GA

7—ABYSS
(–) 350, Parts Unknown

8—BULLY RAY
(–) 296, Hell's Kitchen, NY

9—SAMOA JOE
(8) 280, Los Angeles, CA

10—ERIC YOUNG
(–) 225, Florence, ON

RING OF HONOR

Champion:
EDDIE EDWARDS
(C) 214, Boston, MA

1—CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(1) 224, Los Angeles, CA

2—DAVEY RICHARDS
(2) 205, Othello, WA

3—RODERICK STRONG
(3) 215, Tampa, FL

4—EL GENERICO
(4) 180, Tijuana, Mexico

5—JAY BRISCOE
(5) 215, Laurel, DE

6—HOMICIDE
(6) 205, Brooklyn, NY

7—CHRIS HERO
(7) 225, Metropolis

8—MARK BRISCOE
(8) 215, Laurel, DE

9—CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(9) 265, Lucerne, Switzerland

10—MIKE BENNETT
(10) 225, Carver, MA

Top **10** and tag team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (—) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder of the issue.

FOR PERIOD ENDED JUNE 8, 2011

DRAGON GATE USA: Champion—YAMATO; 1—CIMA; 2—Johnny Gargano; 3—PAC; 4—Naruki Doi; 5—Ricochet; 6—Masaaki Mochizuki; 7—Chuck Taylor; 8—Masato Yoshino; 9—Akira Tozawa; 10—Austin Aries.

DREAMWAVE: Champion—Acid; 1—Hammett; 2—Austin Roberts; 3—Mason Beck; 4—Colt Cabana; 5—Dan Lawrence; 6—Nick Brubaker; 7—Silas Young; 8—Marshe Rockett; 9—Steve Boz; 10—Shane Hollister.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Papadon; 1—Chris Wylde; 2—Bazooka Joe; 3—Kekoa the Flyin' Hawaiian; 4—Kid America; 5—Russian Assassin; 6—Damian Dragon; 7—Matt Saigon; 8—Shockwave the Robot; 9—Mr. Ooh La La; 10—AHTU.

EVOLVE: Champion—Vacant; 1—Johnny Gargano; 2—Chuck Taylor; 3—Sami Callihan; 4—A.R. Fox; 5—Ricochet; 6—Drake Younger; 7—Bobby Fish; 8—Silas Young; 9—Austin Aries; 10—Shiima Xion.

FULL IMPACT PRO WRESTLING: Champion—Vacant; 1—Sami Callahan; 2—Bobby Fish; 3—Caleb Konley; 4—A.R. Fox; 5—Rick Swann; 6—Manu; 7—Craig Classic; 8—Chris Gray; 9—Lince Dorado; 10—Austin Aries.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Col. Spud Wade; 1—Ken Steel; 2—Scott Lee; 3—Jeff Holland; 4—Damien James; 5—Ace Englund; 6—Sgt. Jim Nelson; 7—Eclipso; 8—The Dark Dragon; 9—Jamie Wright; 10—Tony Wright.

NWA CHATTANOOGA: Champion—Tank; 1—Jimmy Rave; 2—Ace Rockwell; 3—Shaun Tempers; 4—Andrew Alexander; 5—Seven; 6—Kyle Matthews; 7—Chrisjen Hayme; 8—Adam Jacobs; 9—Patrick Bentley; 10—Corey Hollis.

PLATINUM CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Grotesque; 1—Chip Day; 2—Mason; 3—Thomas Johnson; 4—The Vandal; 5—Nemesis; 6—Marko Polo; 7—Kyle Matthews; 8—Seth Delay; 9—Brandon Kage; 10—Davey Richards.

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA: Champion—Claudio Cstagnoli; 1—Chris Hero; 2—Low-Ki; 3—Chuck Taylor; 4—Peter Avalon; 5—Joey Ryan; 6—Kevin Steen; 7—Roderick Strong; 8—Willie Mack; 9—Brandon Cutler; 10—Paul London.

RIVER CITY WRESTLING: Champion—Girard St. Christopher; 1—Ray Rowe; 2—Ann Dromeda; 3—JoJo Bravo; 4—Muerte; 5—Joey Spector; 6—Nemesis; 7—Alissa Flash; 8—Big Dogg; 9—Hernandez; 10—Black Belt Jones.

SHOWTIME ALL-STAR WRESTLING: Champion—Vacant; 1—Chase Stevens; 2—Tommy Mercer; 3—Kid Kash; 4—Chris Michaels; 5—Ryan Genesis; 6—Vordell Walker; 7—Johnny Bandana; 8—JP Magnum; 9—Jeff Daniels; 10—Cody Michaels.

TEXAS ALL-STAR WRESTLING: Champion—Scott Zenzen; 1—Dylan Star; 2—Ryan Davidson; 3—Gustavo Mendoza; 4—Amien Rios; 5—Rockstar Robbie; 6—Bubba Lee Travis; 7—Scoby Gober; 8—Leon Magico; 9—Mysterious Q; 10—Johnny Fantasy.

NWA

Champion:
THE SHEIK
(C) 242, Damascus, Syria

1—COLT CABANA
(1) 233, Chicago, IL

2—CHANCE PROPHET
(2) 225, Sacramento, CA

3—ADAM PEARCE
(3) 248, San Diego, CA

4—JOEY RYAN
(4) 210, Los Angeles, CA

5—DAMIEN WAYNE
(5) 237, Hampton, VA

6—AUSTIN ARIES
(6) 202, Milwaukee, WI

7—ANTONIO THOMAS
(7) 235, Panama City, FL

8—OLIVER JOHN
(8) 228, Sacramento, CA

9—ACE ROCKWELL
(9) 212, Atlanta, GA

10—BLUE DEMON JR.
(10) 194, Mexico City, Mexico

JAPAN

1—HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(1) 230, Ogaki, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

2—TAKASHI SUGIURA
(2) 220, Nagoya, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

3—SUWAMA
(3) 260, Kanagawa, Japan
AJPW Triple Crown champion

4—HIROOKI GOTO
(–) 227, Kuwana, Japan

5—NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(5) 190, Saitama, Japan

6—GO SHIOZAKI
(6) 240, Kumamoto, Japan

7—MVP
(–) 259, Miami, FL

8—SUZUKI KOTARO
(8) 180, Warabi, Japan

9—SHINSUKE NAKAMURA
(–) 245, Mineyama, Japan

10—YUJI NAGATA
(4) 238, Chiba, Japan

MEXICO

1—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(1) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico
CMLL champion

2—EL ZORRO
(2) 200, Sevilla, Spain
AAA champion

3—JUSHIN LIGER
(3) 210, Hiroshima, Japan

4—LA PARKA
(4) 220, Hermosillo, Mexico

5—NEGRO CASAS
(5) 170, Mexico City, Mexico

6—DR. WAGNER JR.
(6) 216, Torreon, Mexico

7—VOLADOR JR.
(7) 190, Monclova, Mexico

8—LA SOMBRA
(8) 180, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

9—AVERNO
(9) 170, Mexico City, Mexico

10—CHESSMAN
(10) 230, Villa Nicolas Romero, Mexico

WOMEN

1—MICKIE JAMES
(1) 128, Richmond, VA
TNA Knockouts champion

2—MADISON EAGLES
(3) 160, Sydney, Australia

3—MERCEDES MARTINEZ
(2) 147, Waterbury, CT

4—BRIE BELLA
(6) 125, Scottsdale, AZ
WWE Divas champion

5—TARA
(–) 155, Los Angeles, CA

6—BRITTANY FORCE
(5) 130, Johnstown, PA

7—SASSY STEPHIE
(8) 122, Akron, OH

8—TASHA SIMONE
(7) 156, Dallas, TX

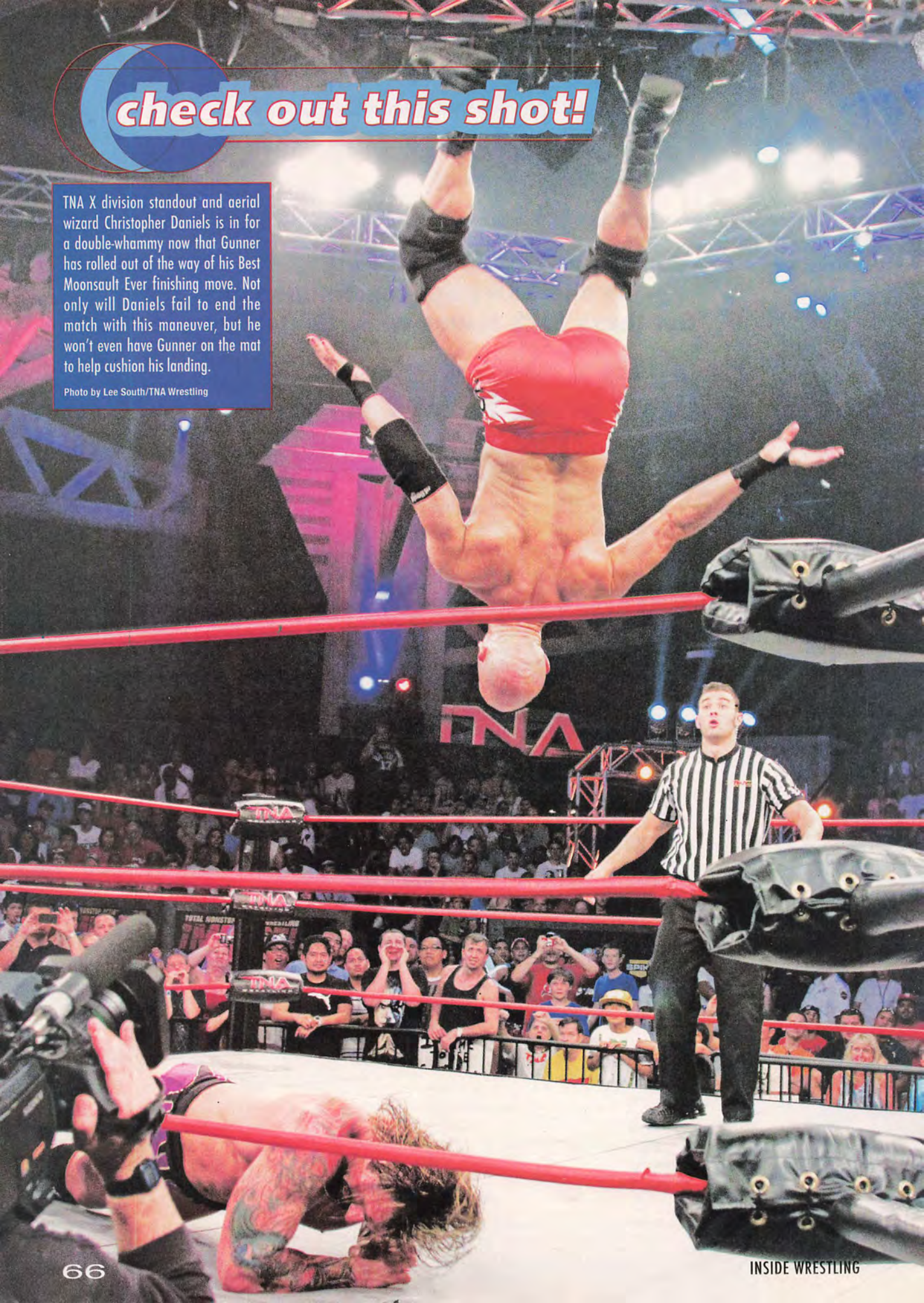
9—JESSICKA HAVOK
(10) 175, Canton, OH

10—KELLY KELLY
(–) 108, Jacksonville, FL

REMEMBER HIM?

Way back in 1995, life was very different for The Big Show. As a member of Kevin Sullivan's Dungeon of Doom in WCW, Show—then known as The Giant—won a WCW World title from Hulk Hogan, as well as *PWI's* Rookie of the Year honors. That was quite an impressive start for the seven-footer, but should we have expected anything less from Andre the Giant's "son"?

check out this shot!



TNA X division standout and aerial wizard Christopher Daniels is in for a double-whammy now that Gunner has rolled out of the way of his Best Moonsault Ever finishing move. Not only will Daniels fail to end the match with this maneuver, but he won't even have Gunner on the mat to help cushion his landing.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

WM 22: THE REAL WINNERS AND LOSERS
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• Sawyer & Cheerio Davey Richards
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When Will Lita Wake Up And Dump This Jerk?

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ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

For period ended June 8, 2011

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN UNIFIED TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: VACANT
(June 3, 2011; vacated by Joe Doering & KONO)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MINORU
(January 2, 2011; from Kaz Hayashi; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: SUWAMA
(August 29, 2010; from Ryota Hama; Tokyo, Japan)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: PAPADON
(March 5, 2011; from Mega; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: CHRIS WYLDE
(December 4, 2010; won a battle royal for vacant title, last eliminating Mozart Fontaine; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: MATT SAIGON & DAMIEN DRAGON
(May 7, 2011; beat Christopher Rockwell & Sam Shields to win vacant title; Newark, DE)

FCW FLORIDA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BO ROTUNDO
(May 19, 2011; from Lucky Cannon; Tampa, FL)

FCW FLORIDA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: CALVIN RAINES & BIG E LANGSTON
(May 12, 2011; from Seth Rollins & Richie Steamboat; Miami, FL)

FCW FLORIDA DIVAS CHAMPION: AKSANA
(April 7, 2011; from AJ Lee; Tampa, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(April 12, 2011; title vacated by Jon Moxley)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JON DAVIS & KORY CHAVIS
(July 31, 2010; from Chris Gray & Tommy Taylor; Crystal River, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: JAKE MANNING
(July 31, 2010; from Brad Allen; Crystal River, FL)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: HIROSHI TANAHASHI
(January 4, 2011; from Satoshi Kojima; Tokyo, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: GIANT BERNARD & KARL ANDERSON
(June 19, 2010; from Wataru Inoue & Yuji Nagata; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: PRINCE DEVITT
(June 19, 2010; from Naomichi Marufuji; Osaka, Japan)

NWA HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: THE SHEIK
(April 23, 2011; from Colt Cabana; Jacksonville, FL)

NWA JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CRAIG CLASSIC
(November 6, 2010; from Mike Quackenbush; Fort Pierce, FL)

NWA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: KORY CHAVIS & JON DAVIS
(May 15, 2011; from A.J. Steele & Murder-One; Warner Robins, GA)

NWA WOMEN'S CHAMPION: TASHA SIMONE
(November 6, 2010; beat Rachel for vacant title; Lebanon, TX)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(June 1, 2011; OVW stripped Elvis Pridemoore after ruling he had beaten Mike Mondo with outside interference)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TED McNALER & ADAM REVOLVER
(April 2, 2011; from Christopher Silvio & Raphael Constantine; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: RUDY SWITCHBLADE
(May 25, 2011; from Jamin Olivencia; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: LADY JOJO
(August 28, 2010; from Holly Blossom; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(October 9, 2010; beat Brandon Gatson, Chris Hero, and Joey Ryan in a four-way for vacant title; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: THE YOUNG BUCKS
(April 9, 2011; from Paul London & El Generico; Reseda, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: TAKASHI SUGIURA
(December 6, 2009; from Go Shiozaki; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KOTARO SUZUKI
(December 5, 2010; from Yoshinobu Kanemaru; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TAKUMA SANO & YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA
(September 18, 2010; beat Akitoshi Saito & Bison Smith for vacant title; Osaka, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: EDDIE EDWARDS
(March 19, 2010; from Roderick Strong; New York, NY)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SHELTON BENJMAIN & CHARLIE HAAS
(April 1, 2011; from Chris Hero & Claudio Castagnoli; Atlanta, GA)

RING OF HONOR TV CHAMPION: CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(December 10, 2010; from Eddie Edwards; Louisville, KY)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: MADISON EAGLES
(April 11, 2010; from MsChif; Berwyn, IL)

TNA TV CHAMPION: ERIC YOUNG
(May 17, 2011; from Gunner; Orlando, FL)

TNA KNOCKOUTS CHAMPION: MICKIE JAMES
(April 17, 2011; from Madison Rayne; Cincinnati, OH)

TNA KNOCKOUTS TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: SARITA & ROSITA
(March 13; from Angelina Love & Winter; Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: STING
(February 24, 2011; from Jeff Hardy, Orlando, FL)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: ROBERT ROODE & JAMES STORM
(January 9, 2011; from Chris Sabin & Alex Shelley; Orlando, FL)

TNA X DIVISION CHAMPION: ABYSS
(May 16, 2011; from Kazarian; Orlando, FL)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: WADE BARRETT
(March 22, 2011; from Kofi Kingston; Columbus, OH)

WWE WORLD CHAMPION: RANDY ORTON
(May 3, 2011; from Christian; Orlando, FL)

WWE TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DAVID OTUNGA & MICHAEL McGILLICUTTY
(May 23, 2011; from The Big Show & Kane; Portland, OR)

WWE CHAMPION: JOHN CENA
(May 1, 2011; from The Miz; Tampa, FL)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: KOFI KINGSTON
(May 1, 2011; from Sheamus; Tampa, FL)

WWE DIVAS CHAMPION: BRIE BELLA
(April 11, 2011; from Eve Torres; Bridgeport, CT)

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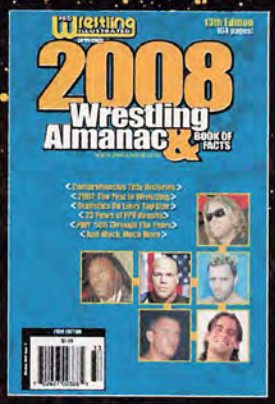

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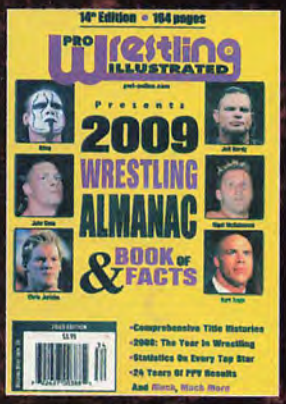

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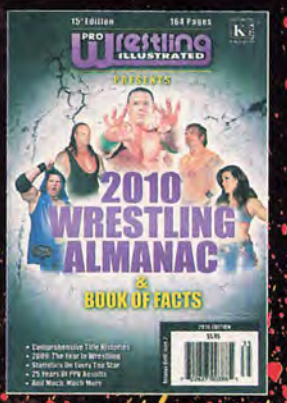

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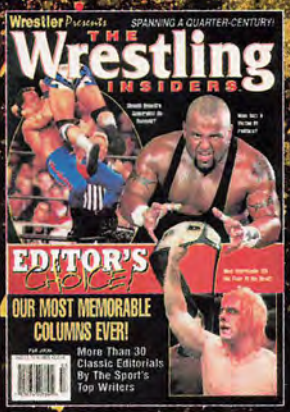
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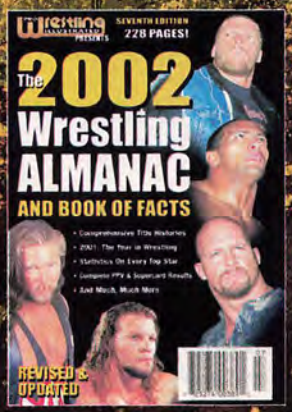

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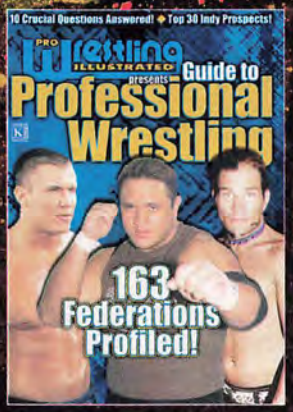
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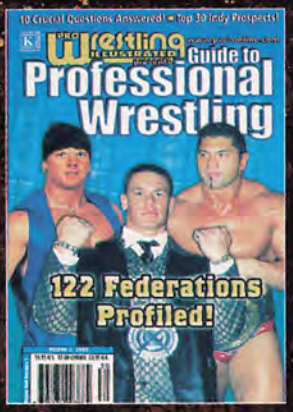
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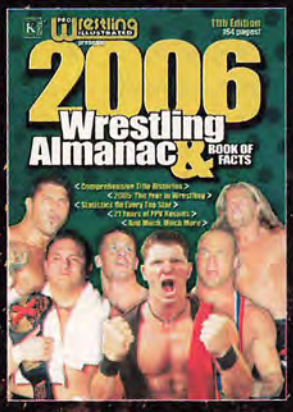

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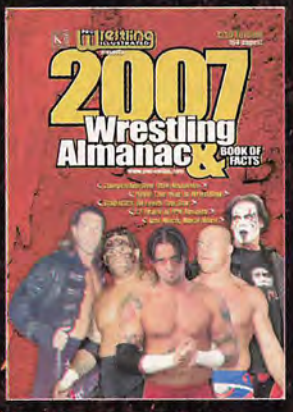

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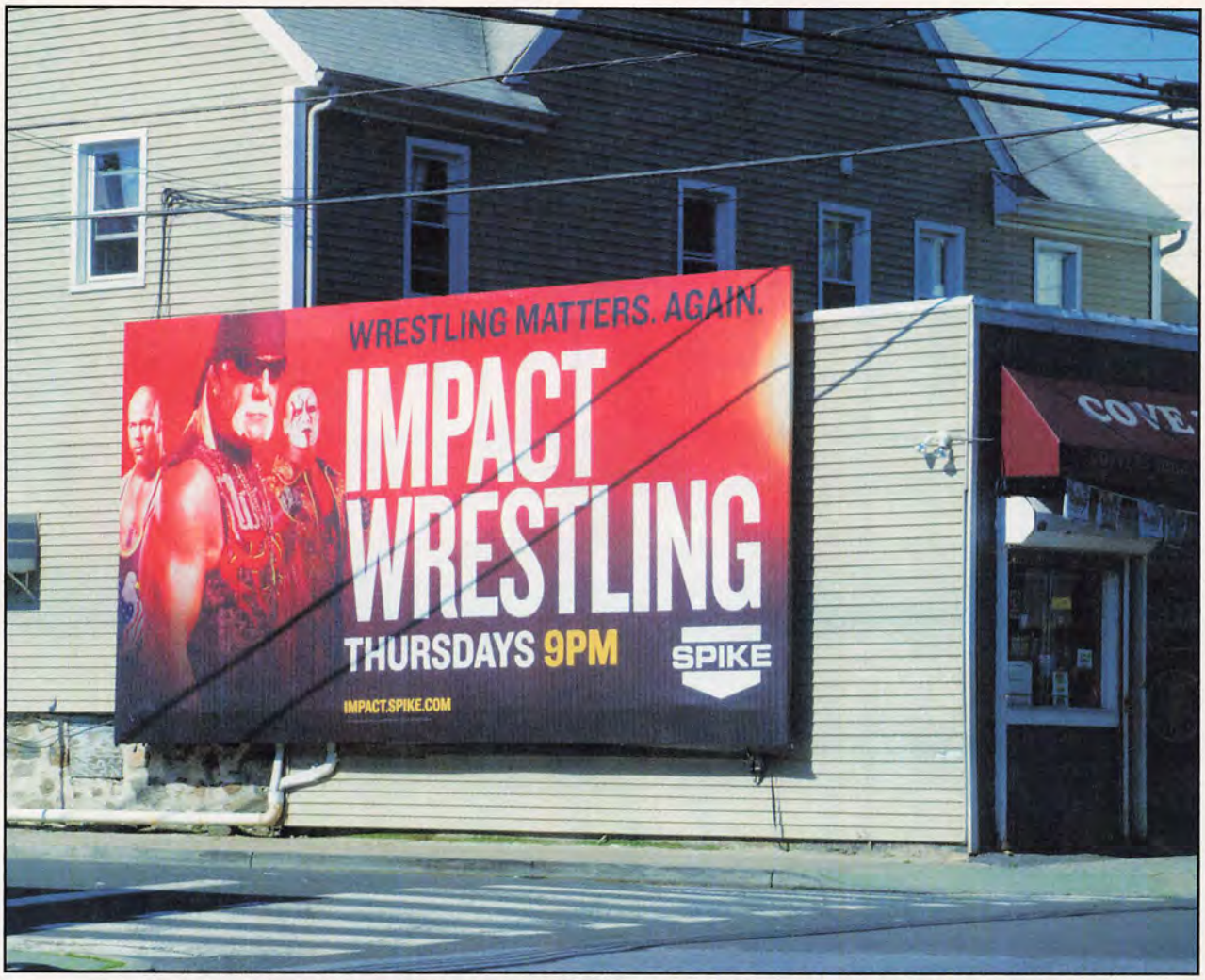

Setting up a billboard down the road from WWE headquarters in Stamford, Connecticut, may be a novel way for TNA to bring the fight to Vince McMahon. We're sure TNA's placement of the ad brought a chuckle from the powers in Titan Tower.

TNA never got a fair break in WWE. That includes Matt Morgan, The Pope, and even Mr. Anderson.

CASTLE: I don't think anybody here would deny that all those guys have a big upside. Heck, we were all in agreement last year when we picked AJ to be number one in the "*PWI* 500." But, the reality is that none of those people you mentioned are treated as the real stars of the show. Those spots are reserved for the likes of Hogan, Bischoff, Mick Foley, Ric Flair, Kurt Angle, Jeff Hardy and just about anyone else who made a name for himself in WWE. Just look at AJ today. Weeks after we picked him as the number-one wrestler in the world, he was feuding with Doug Williams over the TV title in the mid-card, while Jeff Hardy was stumbling his way through main events.

SAKS: All that said, is there anything to gain by acknowledging WWE as much as TNA does?

KREWDA: I don't think so. Whether it is intentional or not, I think it sends the wrong message—that TNA bases its decisions on what happens in WWE. I think it is impossible for TNA to build anything if it keeps putting that message out there.

BESSLER: I understand your point, Frank. But I think TNA is just trying to let the fans and WWE know that it's on the scene.

CASTILLO: (*Laughs*) Dixie should be grateful WWE pays TNA as little mind as it does. I'm sure Vince can pull a locker room raid anytime he wants and leave the roster depleted. The more TNA attempts to position itself as a competitor to WWE, the less formidable it looks.

SAKS: I'm with you on that, Al. Inviting a comparison between itself and WWE doesn't seem like a sound strategy, but I think there are a substantial number of fans out there who are upset that WWE is giving the impression that it's embarrassed to be in the rasslin' business. The message TNA is bringing is that they embrace the product and the fans. I'm not so sure it was a good idea to place a billboard on a dilapidated building a mile from WWE headquarters, but if TNA follows through and makes TNA more about wrestling than gab, I think they're onto something. □

"WWE is giving the impression that it's embarrassed to be in the rasslin' business. The message TNA is bringing is that they embrace the product and the fans."

—Stu Saks

Monday Night Raw has nearly three times the audience of *Impact Wrestling*. Clearly, there are plenty of people still watching wrestling on television, just not as many are watching TNA.

CASTLE: Right, and in order to capture some of those fans, TNA can't just be "WWE Lite." They're never going to beat WWE at its own game; TNA has to offer an alternative.

SAKS: Well, TNA might say they're doing just that. Isn't that what the whole "Wrestling Matters" campaign is about? WWE shuns the "wrestling" label, and TNA embraces it. WWE is PG, family friendly. TNA has plenty of four-letter words, blood, and scantily clad women.

KREWDA: That might be what Dixie Carter is telling herself, Stu. But none of that is groundbreaking. Basically they're trying to be WWE circa 1999. Only, they're coming off more like WCW circa 1999, complete with Vince Russo, Hulk Hogan, and Eric Bischoff steering the ship. If TNA wants to capture the imagination of the public and grow its audience, it has to try something completely new.

BESSLER: I don't think you're giving TNA enough credit, Frank. There are plenty of TNA stars who have never stepped foot in a WWE or WCW ring, including AJ Styles, Samoa Joe, Crimson, Beer Money Inc., and The Motor City Machine Guns. WWE also doesn't have anything like the X division. And a lot of the ex-WWE wrestlers in

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Young, homegrown talent like AJ Styles and Gunner gives TNA the best chance of improving its overall product, according to our panelists. However, TNA continues to cede more air time to its veterans than its future stars.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Chyna and Mick Foley bring name recognition to TNA, for sure. However, that name recognition was built in WWE more than a decade ago. TNA needs to strike on an original idea in order to build greater brand recognition and loyalty.

ago? And it was that aggressive approach that helped make WCW, for a while, the biggest wrestling company in America.

AL CASTLE: It couldn't be *more* different than what WCW was doing back in the 1990s, Mike. WCW already had a big following when they decided to take on WWE. And what helped WCW take over for a while wasn't copying what the competition was doing, but offering something completely different—cruiserweight wrestling, big production, live television. WCW was doing a lot of original stuff back then. There is not an ounce of originality in anything TNA is doing these days.

FRANK KREWDA: There's certainly an air of desperation to TNA's approach. And I don't blame them for feeling that way. Ratings have been pretty flat for years now, while their budget has shot up sky-high. They needed to come up with the next big thing if they were going to create a buzz. I guess they think this whole re-branding is that thing, but aside from the new name, new colors, and new marketing campaign, I'm not sure much has changed over there. And that's definitely troubling.

CASTLE: Well, that shouldn't come as a shock to anyone. TNA is not going to come up with the next big thing by just copying old ideas from the 1990s wrestling boom. But I guess that's what you get when your roster is filled with former WWE and WCW personnel. While WWE's been busy picking up fresh talent like Sin Cara, Tyler Black, and John Morley, who has TNA gone after? Matt Hardy? "Brother Love" Bruce Prichard? Chyna, for goodness sake? When I hear those names, I don't think "progress."

BESSLER: You're not looking at the whole picture, Al. There's a benefit in having talent with proven name value and big league experience on your team. The fact is WWE has lost a ton of viewers from its peak more than 10 years ago. Those fans are out there somewhere, and if you could hook them in with some familiar names and faces, you might be able to turn them into regular viewers.

KREWDA: I'm not sure that's a real sound strategy. I mean, rather than trying to resurrect some old wrestling fans that aren't watching anymore, wouldn't it make more sense to go after the pool of existing wrestling fans?

Is TNA Making A Mistake By Playing Off WWE?

"TNA is not going to come up with the next big thing by just copying old ideas from the 1990s wrestling boom. But I guess that's what you get when your roster is filled with former WWE and WCW personnel."

—Al Castle

ALTHOUGH THE SLOGAN is "Wrestling Matters," the real message in the latest reboot of TNA may be this: "We're not WWE." But even in trying to contrast itself with WWE, TNA is acknowledging it. That's been a growing trend for the promotion, which has tried for years to close the gap in the size of its audience versus that of WWE.

When Vince McMahon recently re-branded his company to drop any reference to "wrestling," TNA quickly followed suit with a re-branding effort of its own. Its flagship cable program, **Impact**, *was renamed* **Impact Wrestling**. *As well, TNA launched a new marketing campaign to promote that "Wrestling Matters."*

Then, of course, there's TNA's talent roster, which includes no fewer than two dozen former WWE wrestlers.

It all serves to paint a picture of a wrestling company whose product is, at the very least, inspired by WWE, and at the most, a knockoff of it.

Is WWE's prominent place on TNA's radar a cause for concern, or a sign that the company is driven to take on WWE?

Recently, Publisher Stu Saks discussed the issue with Editor-in-Chief Frank Krewda, Senior Writer Al Castle, and Contributing Writer Mike Bessler. This is a partial transcription of the conversation.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

TNA might have changed the look of the Impact Zone and renamed its weekly TV show, but the move was still based upon WWE's re-branding. What TNA needs to change, say our panelists, is what happens in the ring from week to week.

STU SAKS: I think it's clear to all of us that TNA is taking a lot of cues from WWE. From the re-branding, to putting up a billboard in Stamford, to introducing a new masked luchador around the same time that Sin Cara debuted, there's no question that WWE is on the mind of Dixie Carter. Is this a bad thing?

MIKE BESSLER: It doesn't have to be. I mean, to some extent, aren't they doing what a lot of us have been calling on them to do for years? They're getting in Vince McMahon's face and bringing the fight to him. How is that any different than what WCW did 15 years

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June 2001 (116 Pages): The PWI Poll. Plus: Ric Flair, Chyna, Steve Austin.

Wrestling and while nearly winning Season Two of *NXT*. And there were some fleeting but encouraging moments on the occasions he was forced into the ring with one of Miz' many enemies (John Cena comes to mind). But it could be a long trip to his ultimate destination, and there's no guarantee that fame, fortune, and glory await him at the end of his voyage.

Adjusting to this new phase of his career isn't going to be a two-day, a two-week, or even a two-month thing. As humiliating as it must have been to carry out a cocky jerk's bidding, it was something he grew accustomed to doing. There was a certain comfort zone established there. He's probably not ready to compete with *WWE's* elite—an elite that most certainly includes former WWE champ The Miz—especially not on his own, and really, there's no shame in that. One day, he might be. In the short term, there will be more lumps for Riley to take, lessons to be learned, and maybe even some one-sided losses to absorb. Deep down, despite his confident and happy exterior, he likely realizes that he'll no longer receive the star treatment working with The Miz brought him. No more four-star hotels on the road. No more limousines to the arena. And no more air time in *Raw* main events. Those privileges are reserved for champions and their hangers-on.

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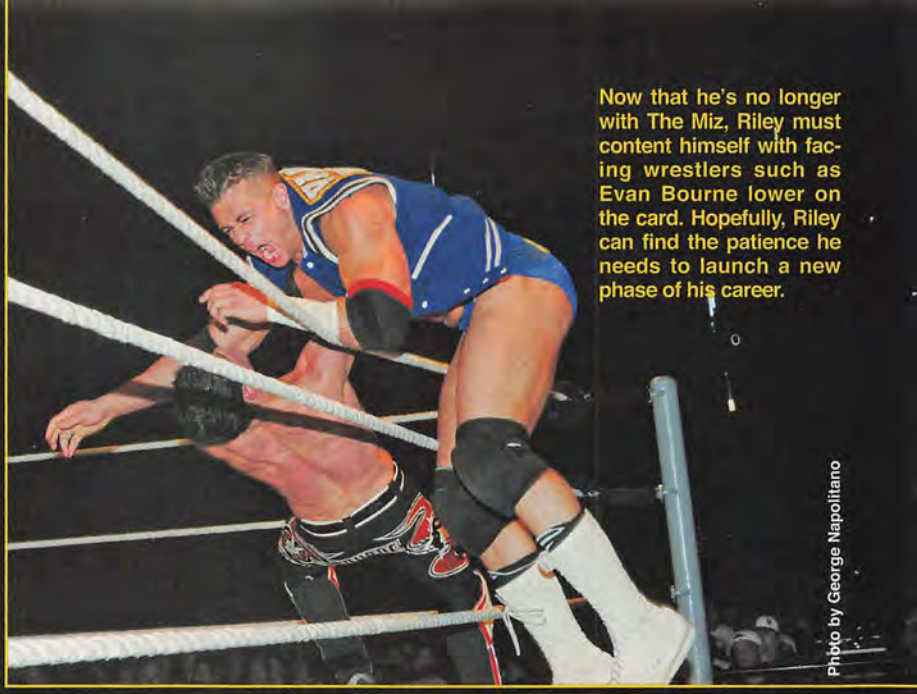


Now that he's no longer with The Miz, Riley must content himself with facing wrestlers such as Evan Bourne lower on the card. Hopefully, Riley can find the patience he needs to launch a new phase of his career.

Photo by George Napolitano

No, Riley must start all over again. He must prove himself in low-card, opening, and probably even dark matches as well as the house-show circuit.

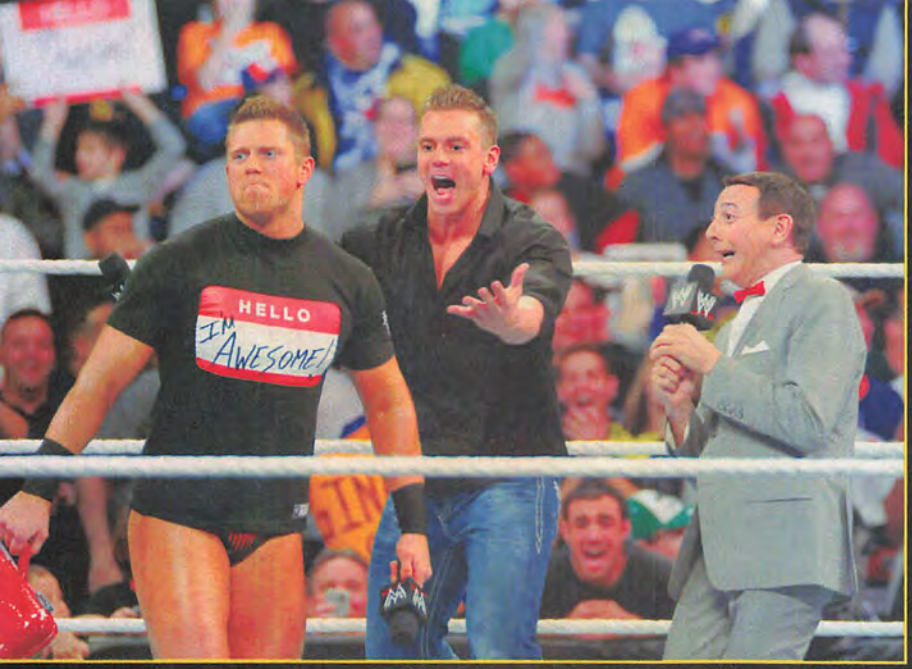
Say what you will about his relationship with The Miz, but one thing is certain: It sure afforded Riley a level of comfort and exposure many WWE newcomers never attain. But now the Good Life for Riley is over. Whatever he achieves in WWE will have to be earned by the sweat of his brow.

One silver lining is that virtually everyone was saying some of the same kinds of things about The Miz, what, a year or two ago. The man was anything but a can't-miss prospect when he arrived in WWE, and he did little to change that perception at the outset. Look how far he has come and how quickly he did it. Now, think about who had a front-row seat to all that progress.

Their relationship wasn't exactly Jedi master Yoda mentoring young Luke Skywalker in the ways of The Force a long, long time ago in a galaxy far, far away, but Miz did write a remarkable success story with a little assistance from his VP. Riley must still have a lot of mental notes on that stashed away somewhere in that thick skull of his.

Probably the last thing Riley wants to be right now is patient—that's understandable—but if he is realistic about where he stands—far closer to the bottom than to the top of WWE—patience is the virtue he will force himself to embrace.

A long year of servitude is finally behind Riley. That deserves a huge sigh of relief. However, an even longer and more trying year now stretches out in front of him. □



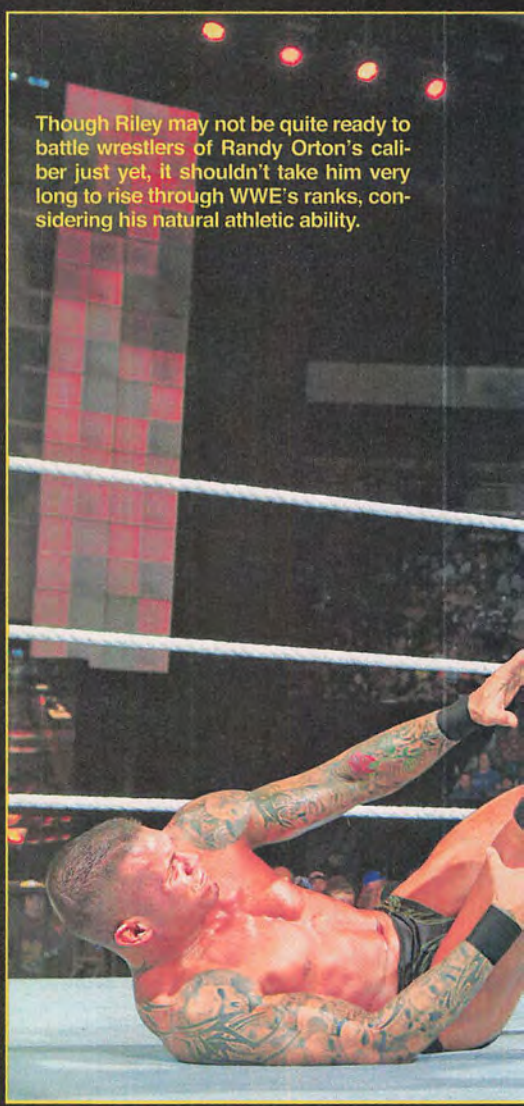
Riley's association with The Miz gave him the opportunity to rub elbows with stars like Pee-wee Herman (above). Sometimes, however, it meant paying a physical toll (below).

Photo by George Napolitano

so fast, young grasshopper.

Thanks to his ties to and eventual split from The Miz, Riley does have lots of momentum. Anyone who stands up to The Miz becomes pretty damn cool in the eyes of WWE fans. Too bad momentum alone can't possibly sustain him for very long, and it's likely to wane quickly.

The shove from Miz on May 23 had to happen eventually, and it may have been just the shove Riley needed to get his own solo career in the right direction. There's little doubt that there's a lot of raw talent inside the body of this 30-year-old former Boston College linebacker. He proved it while toiling in Florida Championship



Though Riley may not be quite ready to battle wrestlers of Randy Orton's caliber just yet, it shouldn't take him very long to rise through WWE's ranks, considering his natural athletic ability.

RILEY: MIZ CAREER?

pay-per-view movie selection for him on the hotel room TV.

Suffice to say Miz is ordering his own room service and selecting his own pay-per-view movies these days. Which seems like nothing but, well, awesome news for Riley. A quick reality check tells you, however, that this is potentially lousy news for Riley.

Now no one is going to argue, even in hindsight, that his opening the door to an alliance with Miz wasn't a pretty stupid move all in all. But hold on just a moment. After all, everybody does know Alex Riley's name now. That wasn't necessarily true in the summer of 2010.

Look past the general stoogery, and his stint as his original *NXT* mentor's vice president of corporate communications/chief lackey didn't serve Riley all that badly *all* the time.

So now he's free—free to do as he wishes, to focus on Alex Riley and Alex Riley alone for a refreshing change, to pursue championship gold, to ... *Hmmmmmm*, not

Photo by George Napolitano

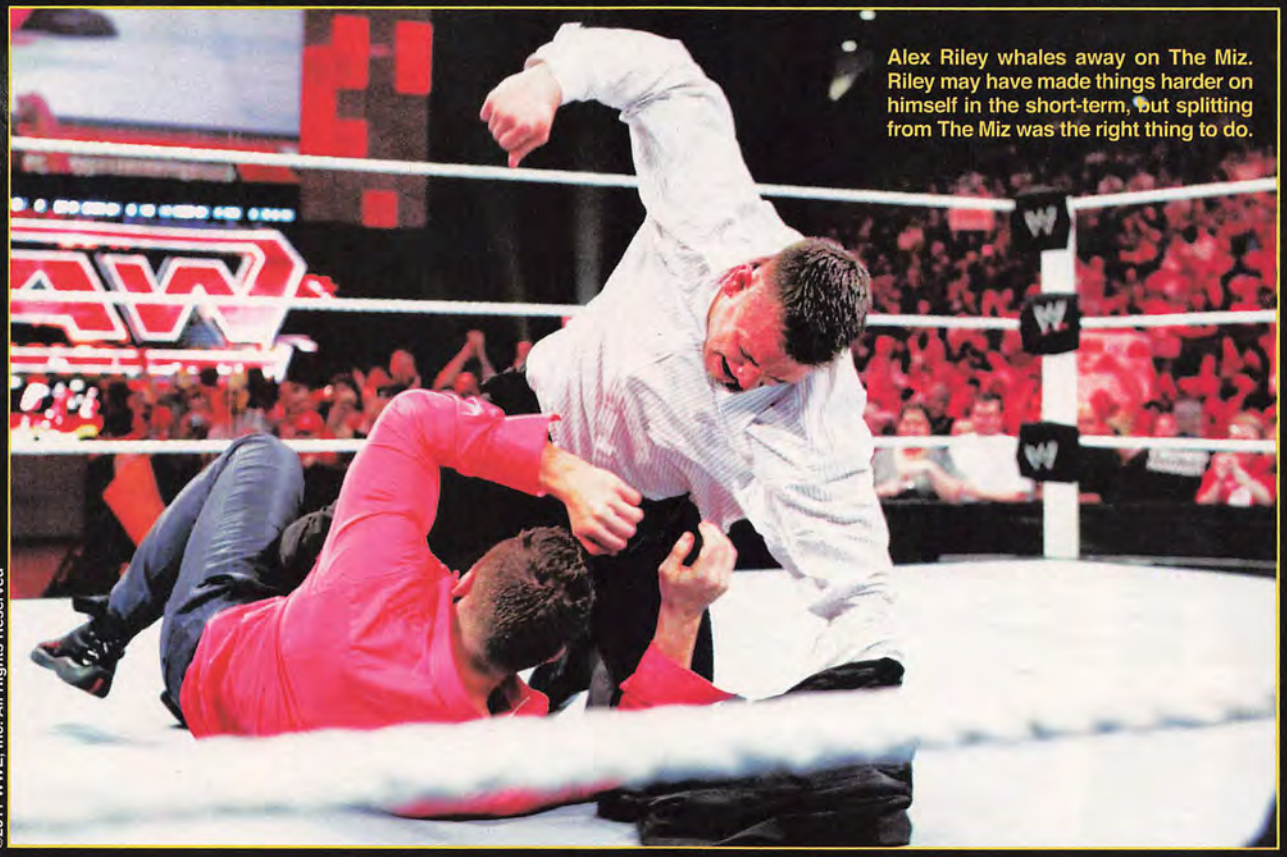
THE LIFE OF
CAN HE THRIVE IN HIS POST-

Alex Riley should have ditched The Miz long before Miz gave him the boot. He realizes that now. The end of their dysfunctional alliance was ugly yet cathartic for Riley, but things won't get more pleasant for him just yet

By Dave Lenker

WHEN OPPORTUNITY CAME a-knockin' not even 365 days ago, a virtual unknown named Alex Riley didn't just sneak a peek through the peephole to find out who pray tell it could be on his doorstep. He opened that door wide with a huge grin on his face, welcomed his visitor into his home, offered up the most comfortable easy chair in the living room, and asked without hesitation, "Can I get you something cold to drink?"

Come on. You could almost envision this happening, literally. The way the situation played out, Riley came up just a half-shred of dignity short of playing Virgil to Miz' Ted DiBiase Sr. You almost wonder if, when Riley and Miz checked into hotels on the road, Riley was there to call in Miz' choice of room service meal and to punch in his



Alex Riley whales away on The Miz. Riley may have made things harder on himself in the short-term, but splitting from The Miz was the right thing to do.

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Yes, there are other ways to secure success in one's career. But anyone who knows the way things work in the sport of wrestling knows that nothing propels wrestlers to the top faster than plunging a knife in somebody's back. The law of the jungle prevails in WWE, and R-Truth is only doing what history has demonstrated he needs to do. Still, it's a tough pill for some "Little Jimmys" to swallow.

"There's more to wrestling than winning titles at any cost," said former longtime R-Truth fan James Tulley. "We supported him through everything, and we thought the respect we showed the guy was mutual. Obviously, he was only using us, and even though he's not the first WWE superstar to do that, I'd have to say this one hurts a whole lot more. I think I can speak for the rest of his fans when I say that we trusted the guy. And that's something he can't win back as easily as a championship."

Photo by George Napolitano

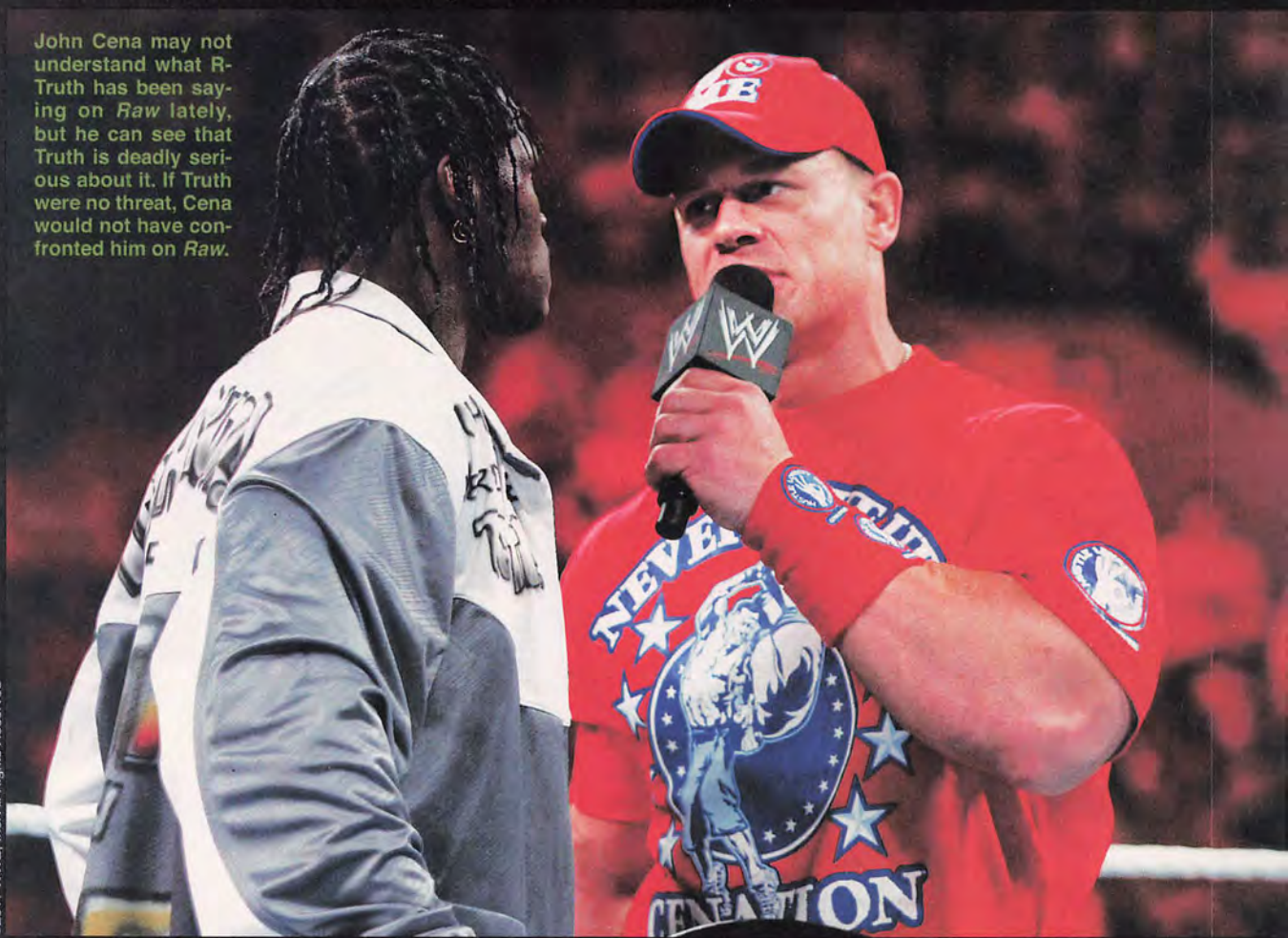
Once a crowd-pleaser, Truth dares not enter a WWE ring through the crowd these days. The trade-off, however, might be worthwhile for Truth, who has seen unprecedented success since changing his attitude.

Up till now, R-Truth's only taste of gold in WWE has been the U.S. and Hardcore titles. But never before has he seemed so driven and so determined to win.

First Morrison, then Mysterio. Heaven help the fool that gets between Truth and the WWE title. Right now, Cena is in that position. He has no idea what's in Truth's head, but Cena understands full well that he's dealing with somebody who's primed and ready to take his gold and glory.

"I don't know what he's talking about half the time," Cena explains, "but I have to take him seriously. R-Truth has himself all wound up. He's dangerous right now. He's a threat."

Nice guys very often do finish last, but R-Truth has no intention of being one of them. For Truth, doing things "the right way" all these years has resulted in unmet expectations, disappointment, and disillusionment. Now, he has a Plan B, and he's ready to put it into motion, "Little Jimmys" be damned. □



John Cena may not understand what R-Truth has been saying on *Raw* lately, but he can see that Truth is deadly serious about it. If Truth were no threat, Cena would not have confronted him on *Raw*.

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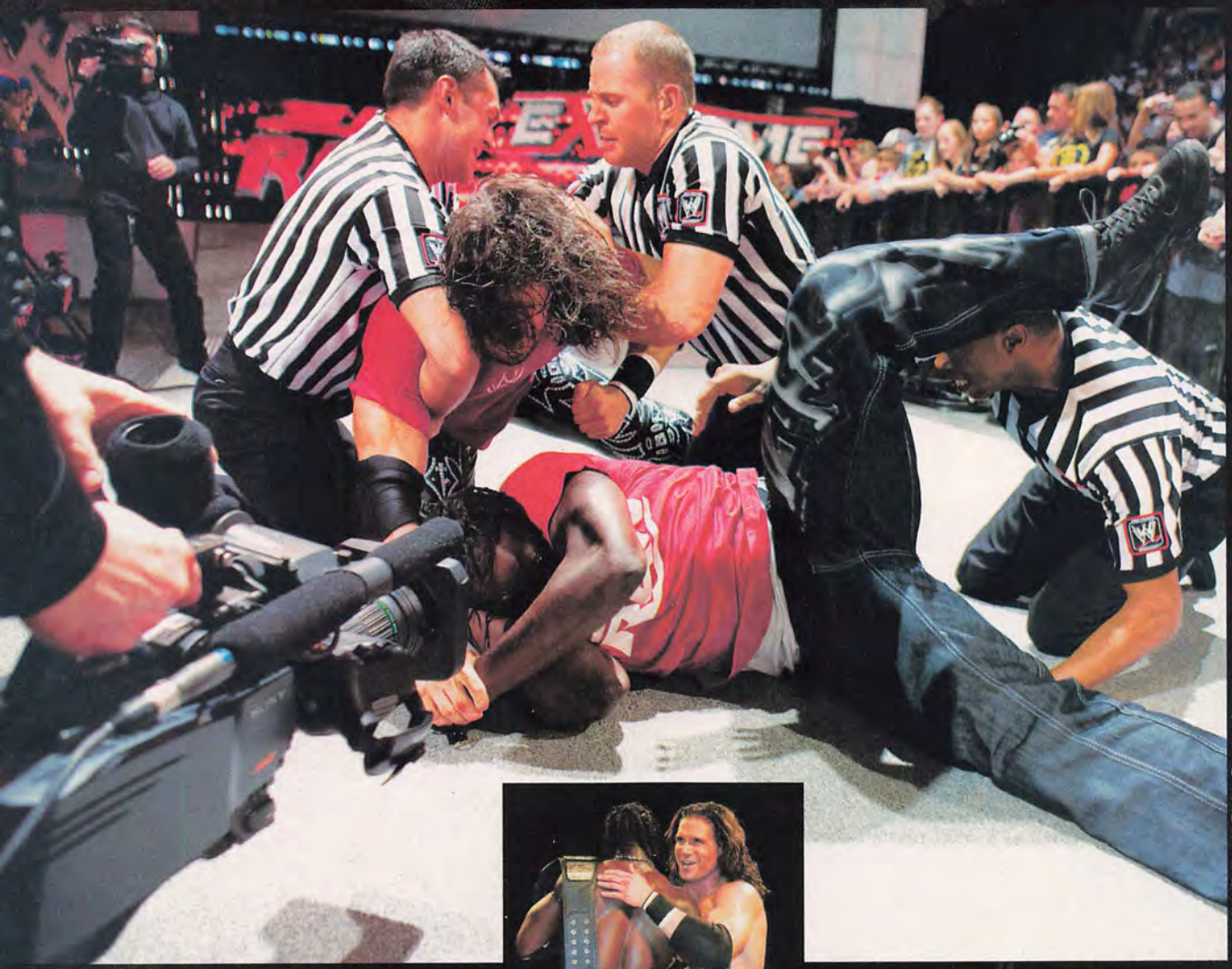

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Photo by Matt Roberts

Truth and John Morrison were friends and tag team partners (right) until Morrison "stole" Truth's WWE title shot against John Cena at Extreme Rules. Incensed, Truth retaliated by attacking Morrison on *Raw (above)*.

in arenas all over the world. And, yet, look at the satisfaction on his face now that he has turned that catchphrase into a vindictive "Shut Up!" That about sums it up. R-Truth is done listening to the fans. Their support may have felt really great for a while, but in the long run, it did not succeed in putting gold around his waist. This new change of attitude, however, just may do that.

Morrison may have gotten the championship match with Cena at Extreme Rules, but the new—and some would say improved—R-Truth saw to it that it all came to nothing. Truth took great pleasure in ruining Morrison's opportunity, something he never would have even considered doing before. Not only was he dead-set on targeting the champion himself, he was also clearly out to make sure that no one else on the Raw roster had the chance to unseat Cena before he did.

Case in point: Rey Mysterio Jr. quickly became R-Truth's next victim in May for "stealing" his title shot. R-Truth had succeeded in putting Morrison on the shelf indefinitely, and then took his best aim at Mysterio at Over the Limit. Once again, Truth came out triumphant, finishing off Mysterio and continuing on his seemingly unstoppable march toward the WWE championship.

R-Truth may have spent some time on the rule-breaker side of the fence during his years competing in TNA, but this aggressive and ruthless demeanor is something entirely new to the WWE fan base, which has only known him as one of the most fan-friendly wrestlers to come along in quite some time. It's easy to understand their heartbreak, and the sense of rejection they feel at losing one of their favorites. And yet, when looking at it from R-Truth's point of view, his motives become clear.

R-Truth beats the Cop

He's angry, desperate, and ready to win it all

BY BRIAN SOLOMON

There's an old cliché that tells us nice guys finish last. And while this may not always necessarily be true, one can't dispute that the recent developments in the career of R-Truth seem to give the adage some credence. R-Truth recently decided it was in his best interest to stop being a nice guy, and it would be hard to dispute the fact that his profile in WWE has been raised higher than ever before.

"There's only so far that a clever dance routine and some rapping is going to get you," said one of R-Truth's longtime trainers and confidantes. "He played by the rules for a long time, and what did it get him? He's not a clown, he's a very talented athlete with a killer instinct. And now he's getting to show it."

Looking at the situation with an objective eye, it's easy to understand R-Truth's perspective. Here he was, a WWE championship match within his grasp, when John Morrison stepped in and ruined things, costing Truth a title shot against John Cena at the Extreme Rules pay-per-view. It may have been quite a shock to witness R-Truth lighting up and blowing cigarette smoke in the face of the fallen Morrison on *Raw*, but it is less shocking now that we can all see how R-Truth's prospects went up in smoke as well.

R-Truth played the game for years, catering to the fans and spouting his famous "What's Up?" rap to an uproarious response

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Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

At one time, Karen's presence in TNA was a source of inspiration to Kurt (above). Since marrying Jeff Jarrett (right), Karen has remained a source of motivation for Kurt, but for vastly different reasons.

pretty much done whatever he's wanted. If he says the Olympics and MMA are in his sights, why should anyone question his ability to follow through?

Naturally, his fans have great faith in their hero, but Angle's most bitter foes remain intent on tainting his every aspiration with venomous rhetoric and mudslinging.

"Am I surprised that Kurt has all these plans? No, 'surprised' is not the word for it," grouses Karen Jarrett. "I've always known he's a glory hound. I mean, Kurt always wants more. He's very selfish that way. He always puts his wants and needs before everybody else's."

"King Of The Mountain" Jeff Jarrett, undoubtedly sensitive to his continued failure to eliminate Angle as a top-tier competitor in TNA, is perhaps the most antagonistic of Angle's detractors. Jarrett openly doubts Angle's abilities with unabashed acrimony: "The whole world saw me take him apart in our MMA match at Genesis. I left him in a pool of his own damn blood. The Olympics? Give me a break!"

With goals as lofty as the ones Angle declared in late-April and considering his unparalleled willfulness, it is doubtful he would ever allow the Jarretts' comments to give him pause. If anything, he will use them to fuel his training in MMA, the Olympics, and in TNA.

And he'll need all the fuel he can get. Let's face it: The idea of Angle successfully competing in the octagon or on the Olympic stage at his age and with his history of injury seems potentially dangerous. But in Angle's mind, it's just another opportunity to prove himself to those who doubt his greatness. □

Angle said he'd shut Mr. Anderson up at Lockdown 2010 and used a mix of aerial attacks and mat-based moves to deliver on his promise. With a history of living up to his own hype, why should anybody question Angle's aspirations outside the Impact Zone?

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

for Angle. He wants to accomplish more.

Some would marvel at Angle' drive, but his most incredulous critics speculate that his well-publicized personal issues, including a protracted and ugly feud with his ex-wife, Karen, have effectively clouded his objectivity, driving him to take repeated and unnecessary risks with regard to his health and well-being, especially in the ring. Similar concerns manifested in the recent past when Kurt expressed interest in crossing over to the world of MMA fighting. To Angle, all of his endeavors, from wrestling to Olympic competition to MMA, are part of the same grand vision fueled by an overwhelming aspiration to be the best of the best at what he does.

However, not everybody has been willing to step aboard the Kurt Angle Express to the Top. Whether it has been critics ripping him for out-of-ring incidents, performing dangerous maneuvers in the ring in spite of his fragile neck, or simply dismissing Angle's stated goals as "Kurt just being Kurt," Angle has no shortage of people doubting he can fulfill his Olympic and MMA dreams.

But for every naysayer out there, Angle has the same reply: "I'm Kurt Angle, an Olympic freakin' hero. Yes, I've said some things people might consider outrageous in the past, but in the ring, who can outwrestle me? I can back up my words on the mat. So if I say I am going to wrestle in the Olympics or fight in MMA, you'd better believe I'm going to do it."

Angle has never been shy about showing off his Olympic Gold medal. Angle says he's training to enter the 2012 Olympics in London. If that somehow comes to pass, at least this time he won't have to compete with a "broken freakin' neck."

Angle's self-confidence is well founded. Years ago, doctors said Angle's oft-injured neck would curtail his career. But Angle said he would be fine, and has won several world championships since then. Similarly, Angle said he was the best wrestler in TNA when he arrived there in 2006. In 2007, he proved that claim by winning every title belt TNA had to offer—taking the TNA World tag team and X division titles from Samoa Joe at Hard Justice to match his own TNA World and IWGP heavyweight championships.

In 2010, Angle warned that he would make Mr. Anderson pay at Lockdown for disrespecting the U.S. military. Angle performed several high-risk maneuvers from atop the cage in that match, and though he drew a rebuke from those who felt the risk wasn't worth the reward, he silenced Anderson and walked away relatively unscathed.

Even outside the ring, Angle seems to be coated in Teflon. The list of Angle's personal errors includes an allegedly violent domestic dispute, driving without a license, drug possession, and driving under the influence. Yet his bad behavior hasn't stuck to him the way, say, Jeff Hardy's has stuck to him. Angle simply has a knack for courting danger and skirting the consequences. Or maybe it's because Angle brings so much talent to the sport that people are willing to forgive or overlook his mistakes.

Throughout his career, Angle has

Jeff Jarrett should know as much as anyone how qualified Kurt Angle is for MMA competition. Angle took Jarrett apart in their match at Genesis, until Jarrett called on his stooges to attack Angle.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

THE TUMULTUOUS LIFE OF KURT ANGLE

"I WANT IT ALL ... AND I CAN HAVE IT ALL"

BY MIKE BESSLER

THINK TWICE BEFORE telling Kurt Angle that he won't succeed. And *don't even think* about suggesting that he can't win. At the age of 42—a point at which most men begin contemplating the doldrums of middle age—Angle stands on the threshold of a bold and exciting new chapter in his exceptional career.

In late-April, Angle announced his intent to pursue a berth in the 2012 Olympic Games in London. It's relatively common knowledge among wrestling fans that Angle is the only professional wrestler to win Olympic gold, and although the feat is indeed a noteworthy accomplishment, his original Olympic achievement is now 15 years in the past. Indeed, Angle's late-April announcement regarding his bid for the '12 Olympics was met with skepticism from fans and detractors alike. It is, in fact, quite tempting to wonder if Angle's best years lie behind him. For Kurt, the answer to that question is simple: His greatest victories are yet to come.

Angle has had a great career to date, one filled with championship gold and achievement at the highest levels. But that is not good enough

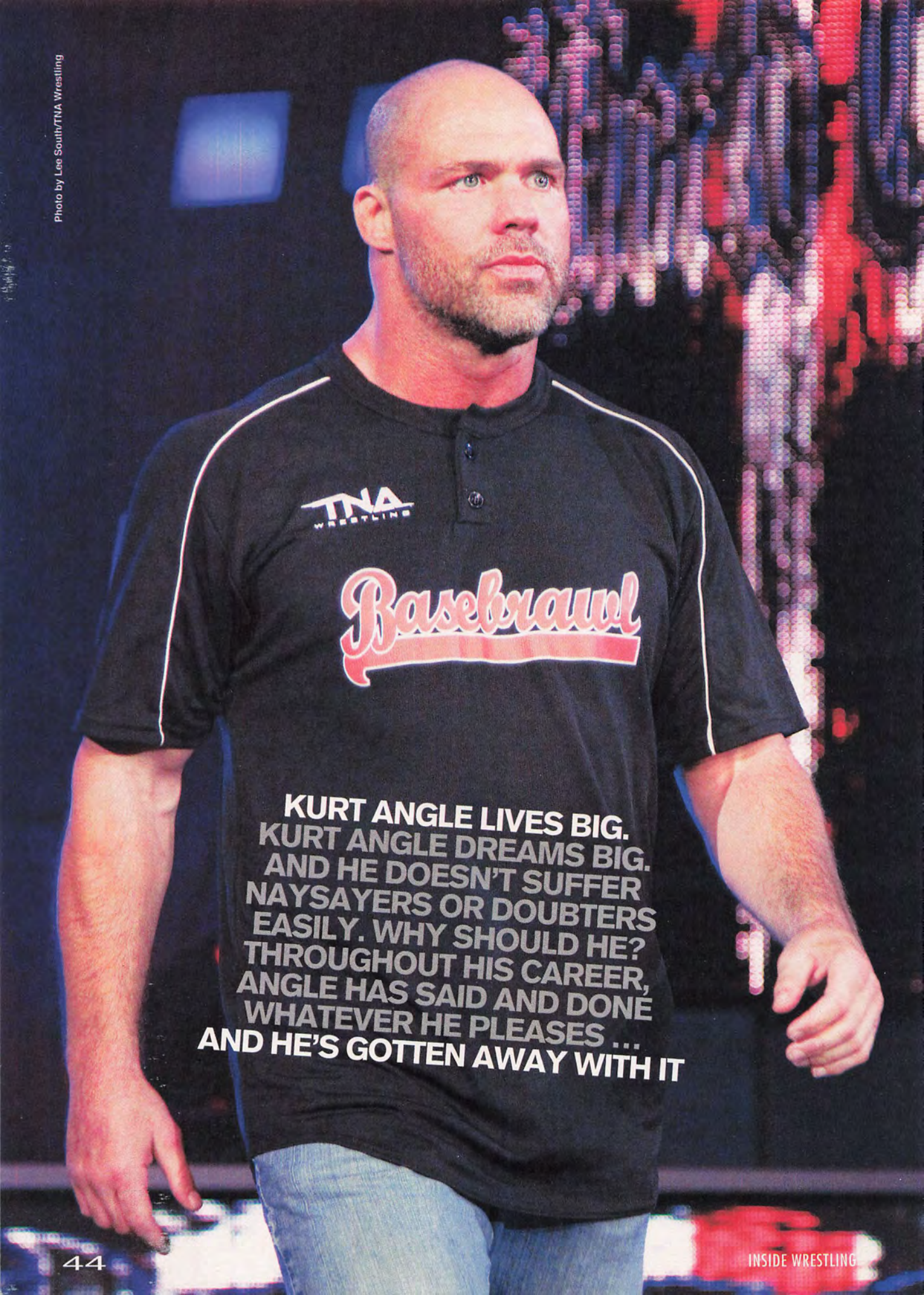


Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

KURT ANGLE LIVES BIG. KURT ANGLE DREAMS BIG. AND HE DOESN'T SUFFER NAYSAYERS OR DOUBTERS EASILY. WHY SHOULD HE? THROUGHOUT HIS CAREER, ANGLE HAS SAID AND DONE WHATEVER HE PLEASES ... AND HE'S GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT

48 Ken SHAMROCK

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 2-1

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost to Davey Boy Smith by disqualification in 1997 ... Won a Lion's Den match against Owen Hart in 1998 ... Beat Steve Blackman in another Lion's Den match in 1999.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

WWE looked to cash in on the former Ultimate Fighting champion's legitimate background at SummerSlam by constructing its version of a cage-fight, the Lion's Den match. In the end, the cramped structure that hosted the bouts may have hurt the action more than it helped.

The Great Khali vs. Batista, 2007

Photo by George Napolitano

49 The Great KHALI

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 0-3

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost to World champion Batista in 2007 ... Was defeated by WWE heavyweight champion Triple-H in 2008 ... Lost to Kane in 2009.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The "Punjabi Giant" may never have won a SummerSlam contest, but he got to compete for a world title on the big show two years in a row. And in both cases, Khali gave the champions a run for their money with his gargantuan size and unmatched strength.

50 TATANKA

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 3-0

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat The Berzerker in 1992 ... Teamed with The Smokin' Gunns to beat Bam Bam Bigelow & The Headshrinkers in 1993 ... Defeated Lex Luger in 1994.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The Native American competitor may be undefeated at SummerSlam, but he's probably known best for his actions after pinning Lex Luger in 1994. After accusing Luger for weeks of being in the pocket of Ted DiBiase, Tatanka revealed it was he who had been bought off by "The Million-Dollar Man."

45 Jeff JARRETT

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *2-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Mabel in 1994 ... Lost a hair-vs.-hair match to X-Pac in 1998 ... Beat D-Lo Brown to win both the Intercontinental and European titles in 1999.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Before he was the founder of TNA (and reminding you of that fact seemingly every week), Jarrett was a ring general called upon by WWE to deliver workman-like performances in the mid-card. He did so at three SummerSlams during the 1990s, and won two of those contests.

Booker T vs. Triple-H, 2007

Photo by George Napolitano

46 Matt HARDY

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-4*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with brother Jeff in losing efforts in 1999 and 2000 ... Lost to Kane in 2004 ... Lost to Edge in 2005 ... Beat ECW champion Mark Henry by disqualification in 2008.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Hardy's tumultuous relationship with Lita was at the center of two of his most memorable SummerSlam matches. He lost Lita's hand in marriage to Kane in 2004, and a year later lost to Edge in the climax of a real-life grudge stemming from Edge becoming romantically involved with Lita.

47 BOOKER T

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *0-5*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost the WCW title to the Rock in 2001 ... Teamed with Goldust in a loss against tag champs Lance Storm & Christian in 2002 ... Lost to John Cena in 2004 in the first of a best-of-five series for the U.S. title ... Lost to World champ Batista by disqualification in 2004 ... Lost to Triple-H in his first match back after a lengthy injury hiatus in 2007.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Five-time! Five-time! Five-time! Five-time! Five-time SummerSlam loser!

THE SummerSlam 50

42 X-PAC

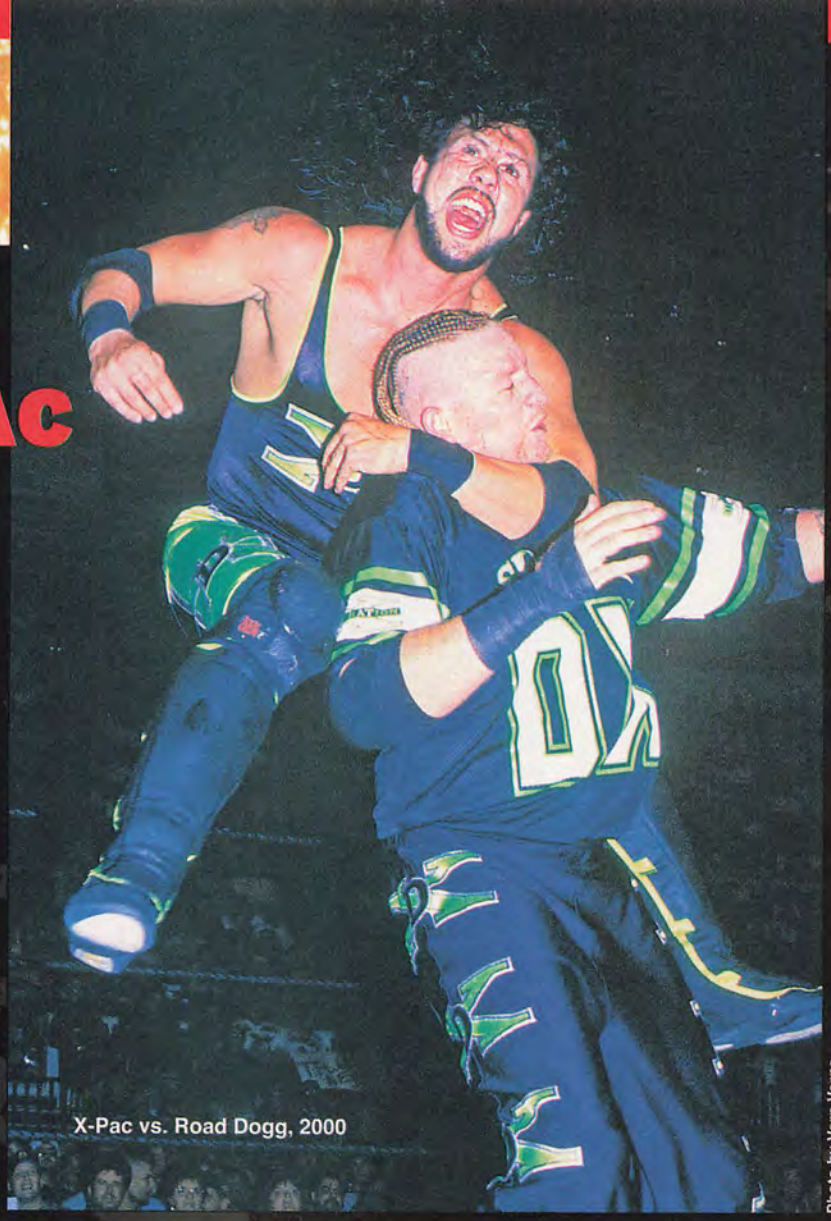
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-3*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost to I.R.S. in 1993 ... Lost to Hakushi in 1995 ... Beat Jeff Jarrett in a hair match in 1998 ... He & Kane lost the tag team title to The Undertaker & Big Show in 1999 ... Beat Road Dogg in 2000 ... Defeated Tajiri in 2001.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

As one of the pioneers of American cruiserweight wrestling, Sean "X-Pac" Waltman partook in some exciting, and important, matches at SummerSlam. By defeating Tajiri in 2001, X-Pac unified the WWE light heavyweight and WCW cruiserweight titles.



X-Pac vs. Road Dogg, 2000

Photo by Vern Verna

43 *Beth* PHOENIX

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *2-0*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Won a Divas battle royal to become number-one contender to the Women's championship in 2007 ... Won the Women's championship while teaming with Santino Marella in a bout against Kofi Kingston & Mickie James in which both the Women's and Intercontinental titles were on the line.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

It may be faint praise, but the "Glamazon" has the best SummerSlam record of any woman, having won two matches and one championship.

44 *Big* BOSSMAN

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *2-2*

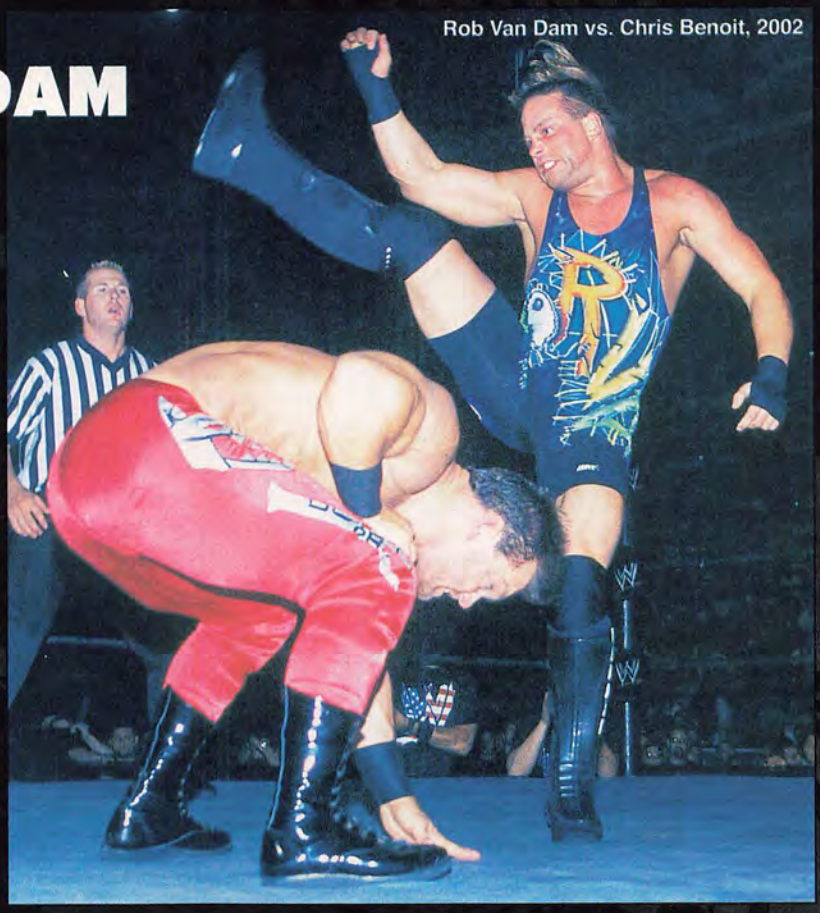
MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Koko B. Ware at the inaugural SummerSlam ... Was in Hulk Hogan's corner for Hogan's co-main event match against Earthquake in 1990 ... Beat The Mountie in 1991 ... Lost the Hardcore title to Al Snow in 1999.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The Bossman was a fan favorite for two of his SummerSlam matches and a rulebreaker for the other two. But he'll probably be best remembered for sending rival law enforcement officer The Mountie to the clink in a Jailhouse match at SummerSlam 1991 in Madison Square Garden.

39 Rob VAN DAM


Rob Van Dam vs. Chris Benoit, 2002

SUMMERSLAM RECORD:
2-1

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Jeff Hardy in a ladder match to win the Intercontinental title in 2001 ... Won the title again from Chris Benoit in 2002 ... Lost to Kane in 2003.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

With six Intercontinental titles to his name, Van Dam can lay claim to being one of the most successful WWE stars of the early-2000s. Two of those six I-C title victories came at SummerSlam. His only other SummerSlam match came against his former tag team champion partner, Kane, who feuded with RVD soon after unmasking.

40 Curt HENNIG

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-3*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Red Rooster in 1989 ... Lost the Intercontinental title to Kerry Von Erich in 1990, and again to Bret Hart in 1991 ... Lost to I-C champ Shawn Michaels by countout in 1993.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Hennig may have gone 0-3 in Intercontinental title matches at SummerSlam, but he had reason to be proud of at least one of those bouts. His 1991 match with Bret Hart in Madison Square Garden was first runner-up for *PWI* Match of the Year, and one of the very best of the late WWE Hall of Famer's career.

41 Andre the GIANT

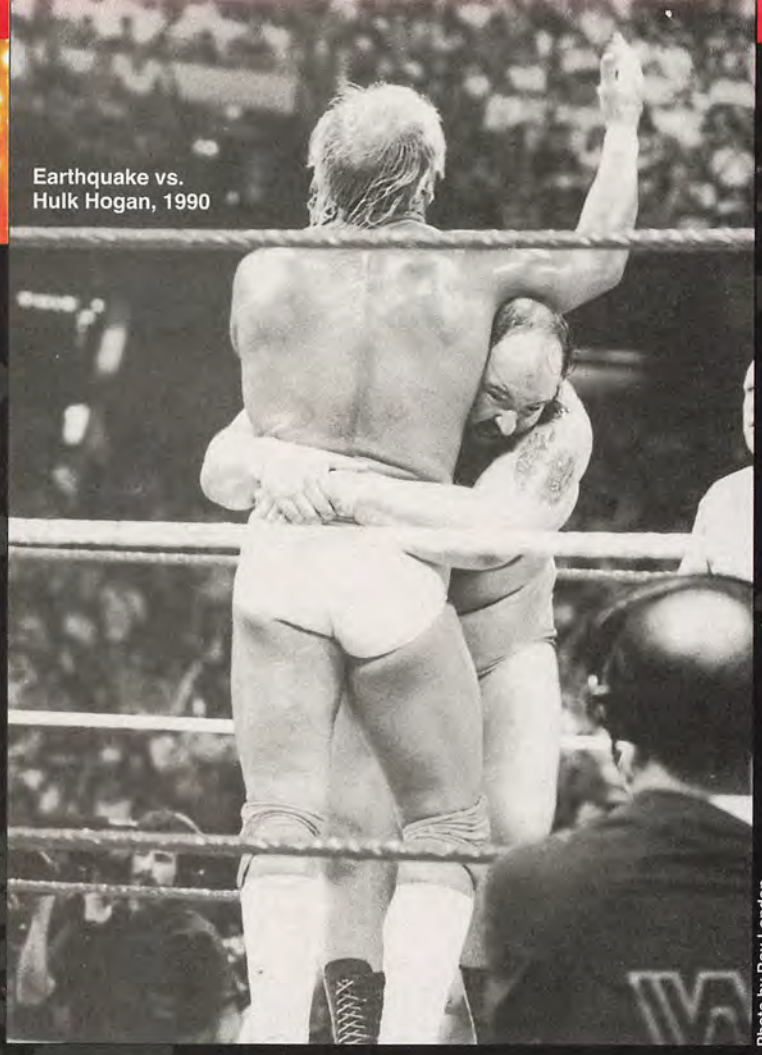
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *0-2*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Ted DiBiase to lose to Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage at SummerSlam 1988 ... Teamed with The Twin Towers to lose to Demolition & Jim Duggan in 1989.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Andre's two SummerSlam bouts came at a time when the legendary big man was struggling just to walk upright, much less compete in a match. Nevertheless, WWE looked to cash in on the attraction of "The Eighth Wonder Of The World," even if it meant limiting him to tag team matches.



Earthquake vs. Hulk Hogan, 1990

Photo by Roy London

36 Billy GUNN

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *4-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Bart Gunn & Tatanka to beat The Headshrinkers & Bam Bam Bigelow in 1993 ... He and Bart Gunn beat Jacob & Eli Blu in 1995 ... The Smokin' Gunns won a four-team championship elimination match in 1996 ... Lost to The Rock in 1999.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The Smokin' Gunns may not be on many historians' list of the greatest tag teams of all-time, but their three wins at SummerSlam prove they were a force in WWE's tag division in the mid-1990s. After going on his own, Gunn climbed through the ranks, leading to the biggest singles bout of his career, SummerSlam 1999's "Kiss My Ass" match against The Rock.

37 EARTHQUAKE

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost to Hulk Hogan by countout in the co-main event of SummerSlam 1990 ... Teamed with Typhoon to beat The Bushwhackers in 1991, and The Beverly Brothers in 1992 ... As Human Oddities member Golga, won a six-man match against Kaientai in 1998.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Leading up to his SummerSlam '90 match against Hogan, John "Earthquake" Tenta was one of the most feared villains in WWE, having put the "Hulkster" on the disabled list for months. That match may have marked the pinnacle of Tenta's career, but it was his 1998 mid-card appearance as Golga that may have captured the true spirit of the late, gentle giant.

38 Jim DUGGAN

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-0*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Was interviewed by Brother Love on the first SummerSlam ... Teamed with Demolition to beat Andre the Giant, Akeem, & Big Boss Man in 1990 ... Partnered with Nikolai Volkoff to beat The Orient Express in 1990 ... Teamed with The Bushwhackers to defeat The Nasty Boys & Mountie in 1992.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The patriotic Glens Falls, New York-native was at his flag-waving best during his three undefeated SummerSlam appearances. He went as far as to paint the stars and stripes on his face at SummerSlam 1989.

33 Eddie GUERRERO

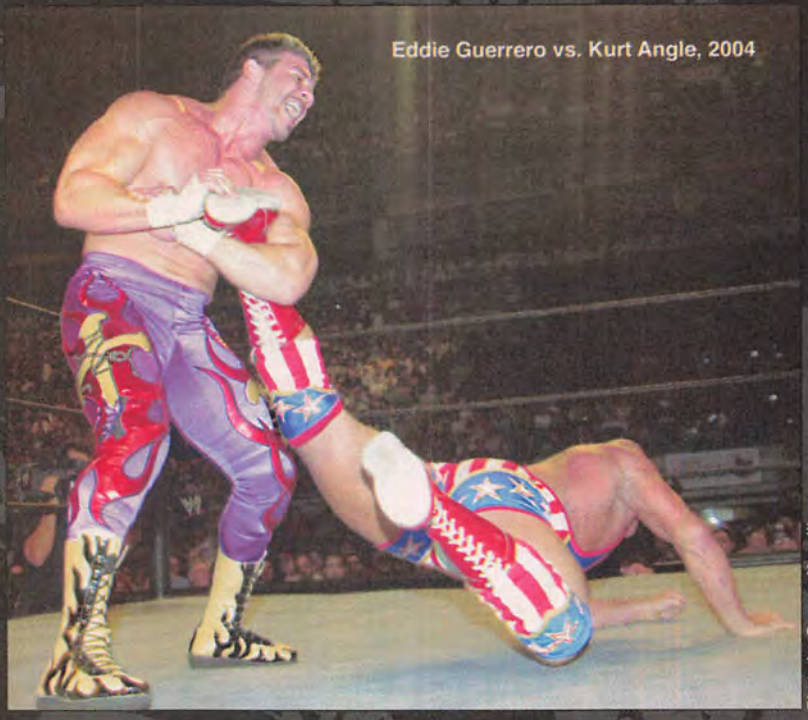
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-4*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Chyna against Trish Stratus & Val Venis in a match with Venis' Intercontinental title on the line in 2000 ... Beat Chris Benoit, Rhyno, and Tajiri in a U.S. title fatal four-way match in 2003 ... Lost to Kurt Angle in 2004.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Guerrero may have had a hall of fame career, but SummerSlam was not where he did his best work. His matches against Kurt Angle in 2004 and Rey Mysterio Jr. in 2005 were both solid, but took a back-seat to more important bouts on those cards.



Eddie Guerrero vs. Kurt Angle, 2004

Photo by George Napolitano

34 Owen HART

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *0-3*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost to brother Bret in a World title steel cage match in 1994 ... Beat Savio Vega in 1996 ... Lost the Intercontinental title to Steve Austin in 1997 ... Beat Ken Shamrock in the first-ever Lion's Den match in 1998.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The high point and low point of Hart's career may have come at SummerSlam. At 1994, he received his first-ever pay-per-view World title match, and took his brother Bret to the limit inside a steel cage. Three years later, he nearly paralyzed Austin with a botched piledriver—a slip-up that would haunt him in his final years.

35 Jerry LAWLER

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-0*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Bret Hart in 2003 ... Beat Jake "The Snake" Roberts in 1996 ... Defeated Tazz in 2000.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Lawler may be best known to the modern wrestling generation as a beloved color commentator, but his first two SummerSlam bouts showed "The King" at his antagonistic worst. He berated Bret Hart's mother leading up to their match, and poked fun at Roberts' alcoholism before their showdown. By 2000, Lawler had seen the light, and defended his broadcast partner Jim Ross' honor in a fight with Tazz.

30 Rick RUDE

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-2*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Junkyard Dog by disqualification at SummerSlam 1988 ... Lost the Intercontinental title to Ultimate Warrior in 1989 ... Lost again to Ultimate Warrior in a steel cage World title match in 1990.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Many have said that Ultimate Warrior owes much of his wrestling success to Rude, and both SummerSlams 1989 and 1990 are evidence of that. Rude's ability to make the uncoordinated wild man look good helped cement Warrior as a World title contender, and later as a World champion.

31 Razor RAMON

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *2-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Defeated Ted DiBiase Sr. in 1993 ... Beat Diesel to win the Intercontinental title in 1994 ... Lost to Michaels in an Intercontinental title ladder match in 1995.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Much of Scott "Razor Ramon" Hall's WWE career has been defined by his affiliation with "The Clique"—a tightly knit group of wrestlers who wielded a lot of influence in the sport in the 1990s. And so it's appropriate that Hall got to work with two of his closest buddies, Kevin Nash and Shawn Michaels, at consecutive SummerSlams, in 1994 and 1995.

32 Ric FLAIR

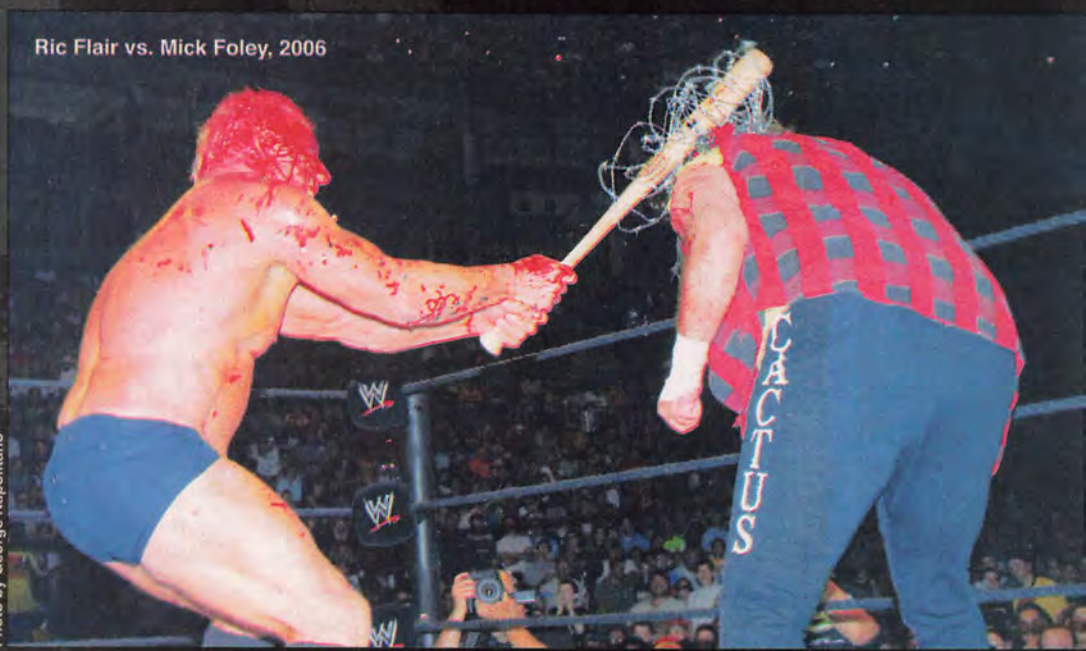
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *2-0*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Chris Jericho in 2002 ... Defeated Mick Foley in an "I Quit" match in 2006.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

He may be the greatest of all-time, but Flair's only two SummerSlam bouts came well after his prime wrestling years. Flair was already 53 years old when he competed at SummerSlam for the first time. That's not to say the "Nature Boy" couldn't go anymore. In fact, his matches with Jericho and Foley were both among the best of their respective SummerSlams.



Ric Flair vs. Mick Foley, 2006

Photo by George Napolitano

27 Lex LUGER

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat WWE heavyweight champion Yokozuna by countout in 1993 ... Lost to Tatanka in 1994.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The pinnacle of Luger's WWE career came at SummerSlam 1993—the destination of the memorable "Lex Express" marketing campaign that saw Luger criss-cross the United States by bus in WWE's attempt to brand Luger the flag-waving successor to Hulk Hogan. Luger went on to beat Yokozuna that night and have quite the in-ring celebration. But he came short of his goal of winning the WWE title.

Lex Luger vs. Yokozuna, 1993

28 Ted DIBIASE SR.

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-4*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Andre the Giant in the main event of the first SummerSlam, losing to Hulk Hogan & Randy Savage ... Lost to Virgil in 1991 ... Teamed with I.R.S. in a loss to The Legion of Doom in 1992.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Not surprisingly, many of the "Million-Dollar Man's" SummerSlam moments shared a similar theme: money. He hired Andre as his henchman to form the Megabucks tag team that headlined the inaugural SummerSlam. He paid Sapphire to ditch Dusty Rhodes at SummerSlam 1990. And he lost his priceless Million-Dollar Championship to Virgil in 1991. Notably, DiBiase's 1993 loss to Razor Ramon marked his last WWE pay-per-view match.

29 The Legion of DOOM

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-0*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat The Nasty Boys for the WWE tag team championship in 1991 ... Defeated Money Inc. in 1992 ... Beat the Godwinns in 1997.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

A year after making their first WWE pay-per-view appearance at SummerSlam 1990, interfering in a bout between The Hart Foundation and Demolition, Hawk and Animal returned to SummerSlam to compete in the most important match of their WWE careers. By defeating The Nasty Boys in Madison Square Garden on August 26, 1991, the LOD became the only tag team to hold world titles in the AWA, NWA, and WWE.

24 Kevin NASH

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-2*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost the Intercontinental title to Razor Ramon in 1994 in Chicago, Illinois ... Retained the WWE heavyweight title against King Mabel in 1995 ... Took part in the six-man World title Elimination Chamber main event of 2003's SummerSlam that was won by Triple-H.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Nash's three SummerSlam matches came during three very different stages of his career. In 1994, he was the up-and-coming I-C champ with a big upside. In 1995, he was the World champion, headlining during a down business period for WWE. And in 2003, he was the returning WWE veteran, slowed by age and injuries.

25 CHRISTIAN

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Edge to win the first-ever TLC match against the Dudleys and Hardys in 2000 ... Teamed with Lance Storm to retain the tag team title against Booker T & Goldust in 2002 ... Beat William Regal in eight seconds to retain the ECW title in 2009.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Although he can now call himself a former WWE World champion, "Captain Charisma" initially made his mark in WWE as a tag team specialist. As such, it's no surprise that three of Christian's four SummerSlam matches have been tag team affairs—including two successful title defenses.

26 Jeff HARDY

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *0-5*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with brother Matt in losing efforts in 1999 and 2000 ... Dropped the Intercontinental title to Rob Van Dam in 2001 ... Lost the World title to CM Punk in 2009 in a Tables, Ladders, and Chairs match.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Hardy may never have earned a win at SummerSlam, but he did plenty to help earn his reputation as one of wrestling's most dazzling risk-takers. Hardy's SummerSlam resume includes no fewer than three matches involving a ladder—two of them ever-dangerous TLC bouts.

Christian & Lance Storm vs. Goldust & Booker T, 2002

21 John Bradshaw LAYFIELD

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *2-3*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

With partner Faarooq, won a six-man tag team bout in 1999 ... Beat The Undertaker by disqualification to retain the heavyweight title in 2004 ... Lost World title matches to Batista in 2005 and to CM Punk in 2009.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

JBL may not be remembered as one of the most impactful champions in WWE history, but on three occasions he competed in a World title match on one of the biggest wrestling shows of the year. Toss in a tag team win against such notable tandems as the Hardys and Edge & Christian, and that's quite the SummerSlam record.

22 Rey MYSTERIO JR.

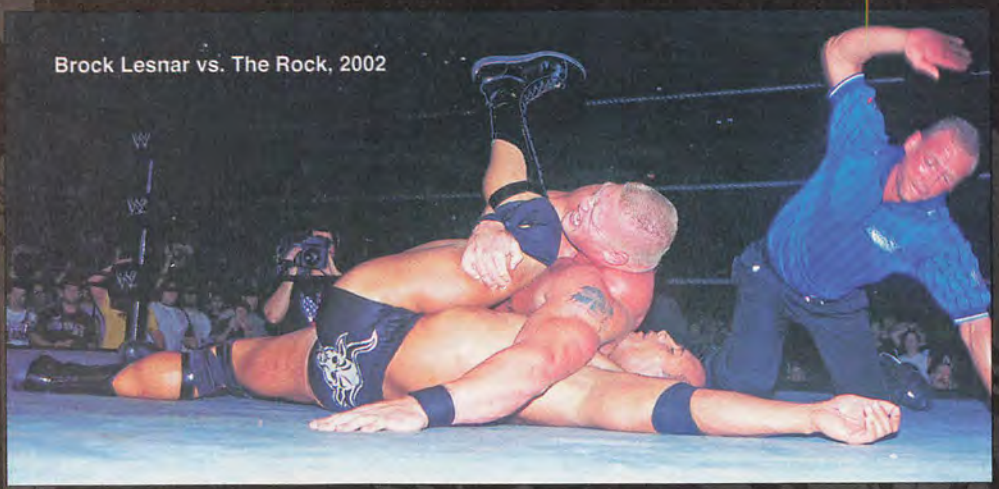
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-4*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost to Kurt Angle in 2002 ... Beat Eddie Guerrero in a ladder match for custody of Mysterio's son, Dominic, in 2005 ... Beat Dolph Ziggler to retain the Intercontinental title in 2009 ... Lost to World champion Kane in 2010.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Although he's competed in two championship matches, it's been in non-title mid-card matches against fellow Mexican high-flyers, Eddie and Chavo Guerrero Jr., that Mysterio has delivered his most memorable SummerSlam performances. His ladder match with Eddie in 2005 delivered both thrills and drama. And his chemistry with Chavo was so strong, he wrestled him twice at SummerSlam, trading victories in 2006 and 2007.



Brock Lesnar vs. The Rock, 2002

23 Brock LESNAR

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *1-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Defeated The Rock to win the WWE heavyweight title in 2002 ... Lost to heavyweight champ Kurt Angle in 2003.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Lesnar's SummerSlam resume may be relatively short, but it contains two monumental World title matches. By beating The Rock at Long Island's Nassau Coliseum, Lesnar became the youngest World champion in WWE until that point ... And his loss against Angle came in one of a series of epic encounters the two world-class amateur wrestlers had in 2003.

18 CM PUNK

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *2-2*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Lost to ECW champion John Morrison in 2007 ... Retained his World title over JBL in 2008 ... Beat Jeff Hardy in a Tables, Ladders, and Chairs match to win the World title in 2009.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Punk's inconspicuous climb from Ring of Honor fan darling to WWE headliner included some major milestones at SummerSlam. He won two consecutive World title matches at the annual supershow, despite being slotted in the mid-card for one of them. Punk's place on the card dropped considerably in 2010, when he teamed with Joey Mercury and Luke Gallows in a losing effort against The Big Show.

19 The BIG SHOW

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *4-0*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with The Undertaker to win the World tag team championship from X-Pac & Kane in 1999 ... Beat Sabu in an ECW title match in 2006 ... Retained the tag title with partner Chris Jericho in a match against Cryme Tyme in 2009 ... Won a 3-on-1 handicap match against the Straight Edge Society in 2010.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The Big Show may be undefeated at SummerSlam, but that's less impressive when you consider how few of the shows he's been on. After wrestling on SummerSlam in the year he debuted in WWE, it was five years before he had another match on the show.

20 Davey Boy SMITH

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-1-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Competed in the first-ever SummerSlam match, teaming with Dynamite Kid in a time-limit draw against The Rougeau Brothers ... Beat Bret Hart to capture the Intercontinental title in 1992 ... Lost to Sid in a World title number-one contender's match in 1996 ... Beat Ken Shamrock by disqualification in 1997.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Smith may have competed in five SummerSlam matches over his career, but he'll be remembered best for one in particular. In front of 80,000 adoring fans at Wembley Stadium in his native country of England, Smith beat his brother-in-law Bret Hart to win the Intercontinental championship in the main event of SummerSlam 1992. The bout was voted 1992's *PWI* Match of the Year.

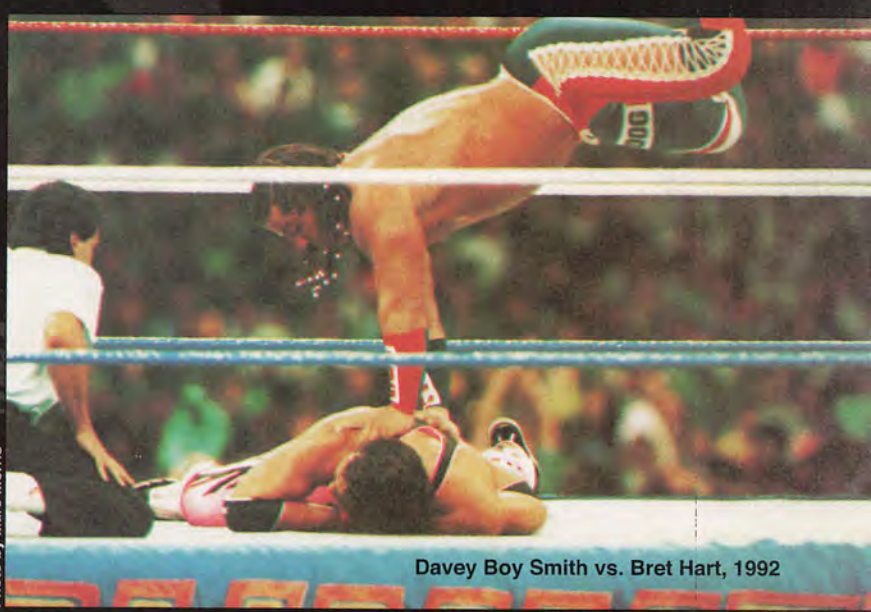


Photo by Marc Morris

Davey Boy Smith vs. Bret Hart, 1992

15 Steve AUSTIN

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 2-2

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Owen Hart for the Intercontinental title in 1997 ... Retained the heavyweight title against The Undertaker in 1998 ... Dropped the heavyweight title at both SummerSlam 1999 and 2001, to Mankind and Kurt Angle, respectively ... Made a surprise appearance in 2007, laying out Montel Vontavious Porter.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Some of the highest highs and lowest lows of Austin's legendary career took place at SummerSlam. His match with Owen Hart marked not only his first WWE singles title win, but also the match that shortened his career considerably because of an errant piledriver. As well, Austin's title defense against 'Taker in the "Highway To Hell" main event in 1998 marked the highest profile battle of two of WWE's biggest icons.

16 BATISTA

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 4-1

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Successfully defended the World title at three consecutive SummerSlams, against John Bradshaw Layfield in 2005, Booker T in 2006, and The Great Khali in 2007 ... Beat John Cena in their first-ever match in 2008.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

As the standard-bearer for Smackdown for much of his WWE career, Batista was slotted in the co-main event of four consecutive SummerSlams. Although he won back-to-back-to-back World title matches, two of those were disqualification victories—tainting his SummerSlam record somewhat. However, his win over Cena in 2008's "dream match" was among the biggest of his career.

17 Randy SAVAGE

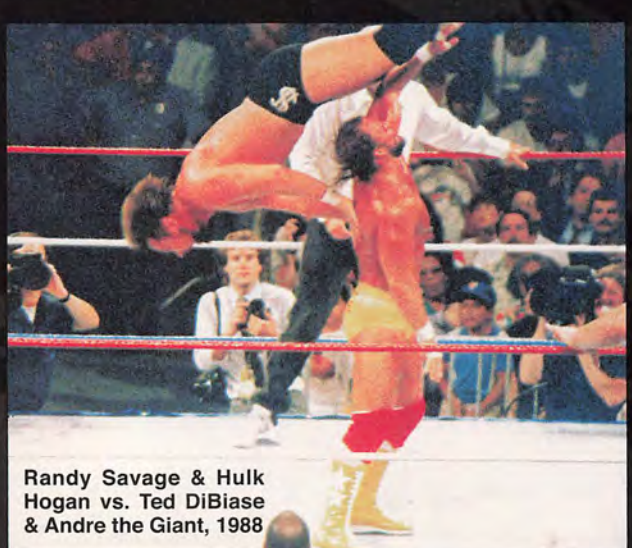
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 2-2

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Hulk Hogan to defeat Ted DiBiase & Andre the Giant in the main event of the first SummerSlam ... Partnered with Zeus to lose to Hogan & Brutus Beefcake in 1989 ... Retained his heavyweight title in a countout loss to The Ultimate Warrior in 1992.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

As one of the biggest stars in WWE in the 1980s and early-1990s, Savage factored heavily into the early-SummerSlam years. But perhaps never was he featured more prominently at the event than in 1991, despite not even wrestling on the show. In the "Match Made In Heaven" main-event segment of the show, Savage married his longtime love Miss Elizabeth in center ring at Madison Square Garden.



Randy Savage & Hulk Hogan vs. Ted DiBiase & Andre the Giant, 1988

12 Mick FOLEY

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-2*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Upset The Undertaker in a Boiler Room Brawl in 1996 ... Beat Triple-H in the steel cage opening match of SummerSlam 1997 ... Won his third WWE heavyweight title in a triple-threat match with Steve Austin and Triple-H in 1999 ... Lost an "I Quit" match to Ric Flair in 2006.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Foley's always had a penchant for the dramatic, and SummerSlam has been no exception. Whether it was having Paul Bearer turn on The Undertaker, paying homage to Jimmy Snuka from the top of a cage, or being awarded the WWE heavyweight title by Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, Foley has been at the center of some of SummerSlam's most memorable moments.

13 Kurt ANGLE

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *5-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Made his SummerSlam debut in 2000, losing a three-way heavyweight title match that included The Rock and Triple-H ... Beat Steve Austin for the heavyweight title the following year ... Defeated Brock Lesnar in a World title match in 2003.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Angle's SummerSlam resume is filled with high doses of athleticism and drama. Against opponents like Rey Mysterio, Lesnar, and Eddie Guerrero, Angle has delivered technical skill and excitement. And whether battling Triple-H over the affection of Stephanie McMahon or Eugene over Kurt's Olympic gold medals, Angle's been involved in his share of SummerSlam soap operas, as well.

14 Chris JERICHO

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-5*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

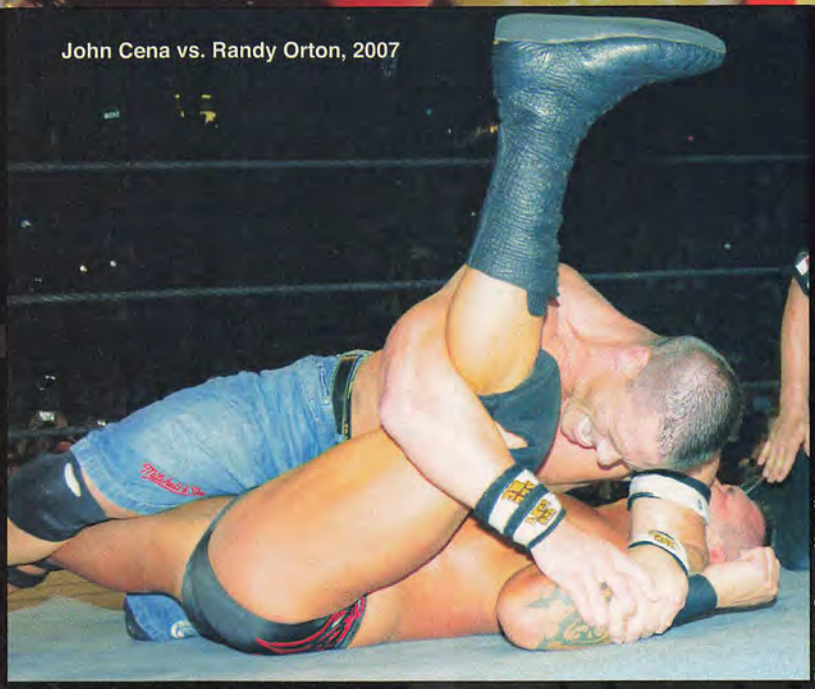
Lost a two-out-of-three falls match to Chris Benoit in 2000 ... Lost to Ric Flair in 2002 ... Lost to WWE heavyweight champ John Cena in 2005 ... Teamed with The Big Show to retain the tag team title against Cryme Tyme in 2009.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Jericho may be one of the most gifted wrestlers of the past 25 years, but his SummerSlam record is not too impressive. In fact, Jericho's most memorable SummerSlam moment was not a match at all, but rather the despicable knockout punch he delivered to Shawn Michaels' wife, Rebecca, in 2008.

Chris Jericho & Big Show vs. Shad Gaspard & JTG, 2009

Photo by George Napolitano



John Cena vs. Randy Orton, 2007

Photo by George Napolitano

9 John CENA

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *4-3*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Booker T in the first match of a best-of-five series for the U.S. title in 2004 ... Retained his heavyweight title in defenses against Chris Jericho in 2005 and Randy Orton in 2007 ... Was the sole survivor of a seven-man WWE team that took on The Nexus at SummerSlam 2010.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Cena may be the most successful wrestler of the past decade, but he hasn't always looked the part at SummerSlam. His record at the show includes key losses in main-event bouts against Batista, Edge, and Randy Orton. His proudest 'Slam moment was in 2010, when he represented WWE in turning back the threat of The Nexus.

10 The ROCK

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *3-2*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Beat Billy Gunn in a "Kiss My Ass" match in 1999 ... Retained the heavyweight title against Triple-H and Kurt Angle in 2000 ... Won the WCW title from Booker T in 2001 ... Lost the heavyweight championship to Brock Lesnar in 2002.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Throughout much of his career, The Rock competed with Steve Austin for the spot as WWE's top act. It was at SummerSlam that "Stone-Cold" clearly took a backseat to "The Great One." Not only did he win two World title matches at the event, but even in losing efforts against Triple-H in 1998 and Lesnar in 2002, The Rock delivered stellar performances.

11 KANE

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *6-3-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Before becoming the "Big Red Machine," Kane competed as wrestling dentist, Isaac Yankem, DDS, in a losing effort against Bret Hart in 1995 ... Wrestled to a no-contest against his half-brother, The Undertaker, in 2000 ... Won Lita's hand in marriage by beating Matt Hardy in 2004 ... Retained the World title against Rey Mysterio Jr. in 2010.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The August spectacular has tracked Kane's career from a promising newcomer to a rugged veteran. And despite the wear and tear on his massive frame, Kane has remained an impact player at every SummerSlam. In fact, it was 16 years after his SummerSlam debut that Kane finally competed in a World title match on the show, and won.

7 Randy ORTON

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 4-3

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Became the youngest World champion in WWE history by defeating Chris Benoit at SummerSlam 2004 ... Beat The Undertaker in 2005 ... Lost a World title match to John Cena in 2007, but then beat him in 2009 ... Beat heavyweight champion Sheamus by disqualification in 2010.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Beginning with his participation in 2003's Elimination Chamber World title match, Orton has been part of some very high-profile matches at the annual event, and won a fair share of them. Taking on such legends as The Undertaker and Hulk Hogan, Orton has helped cement SummerSlam as the biggest event this side of WrestleMania.

Randy Orton, 2004

Photo by George Napolitano

8 The Ultimate WARRIOR

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: 5-0

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Ended The Honky Tonk Man's record 454-day Intercontinental title reign in about 30 seconds at the first SummerSlam ... Won his second I-C title from Rick Rude in 1989 ... Teamed with Hulk Hogan to beat Sgt. Slaughter, Col. Mustafa, & Gen. Adnan in 1991 ... Beat WWE heavyweight champ Randy Savage by countout in 1992.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The wild man from parts unknown achieved some of his most memorable wins at SummerSlam—including four in championship matches. His steel cage match victory against Rick Rude in 1990 may have been the biggest victory in his 10-month World title reign.

5 TRIPLE-H

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *7-5*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Made his WWE pay-per-view debut at SummerSlam 1995, beating Bob Holly ... Beat The Rock in a ladder match to win the Intercontinental title in 1998 ... Overcame Bill Goldberg, Randy Orton, Kevin Nash, Shawn Michaels, and Chris Jericho to retain the World title in an Elimination Chamber match in 2003 ... Successfully teamed with Shawn Michaels on two occasions.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Over the years, Triple-H has used the SummerSlam stage to elevate his opponents, including Eugene, Booker T, The Great Khali, and the team of Cody Rhodes & Ted DiBiase Jr. Some of his opponents won, some lost, but all benefited from working with the "King Of Kings" on such a big stage.

6 *Shawn* MICHAELS

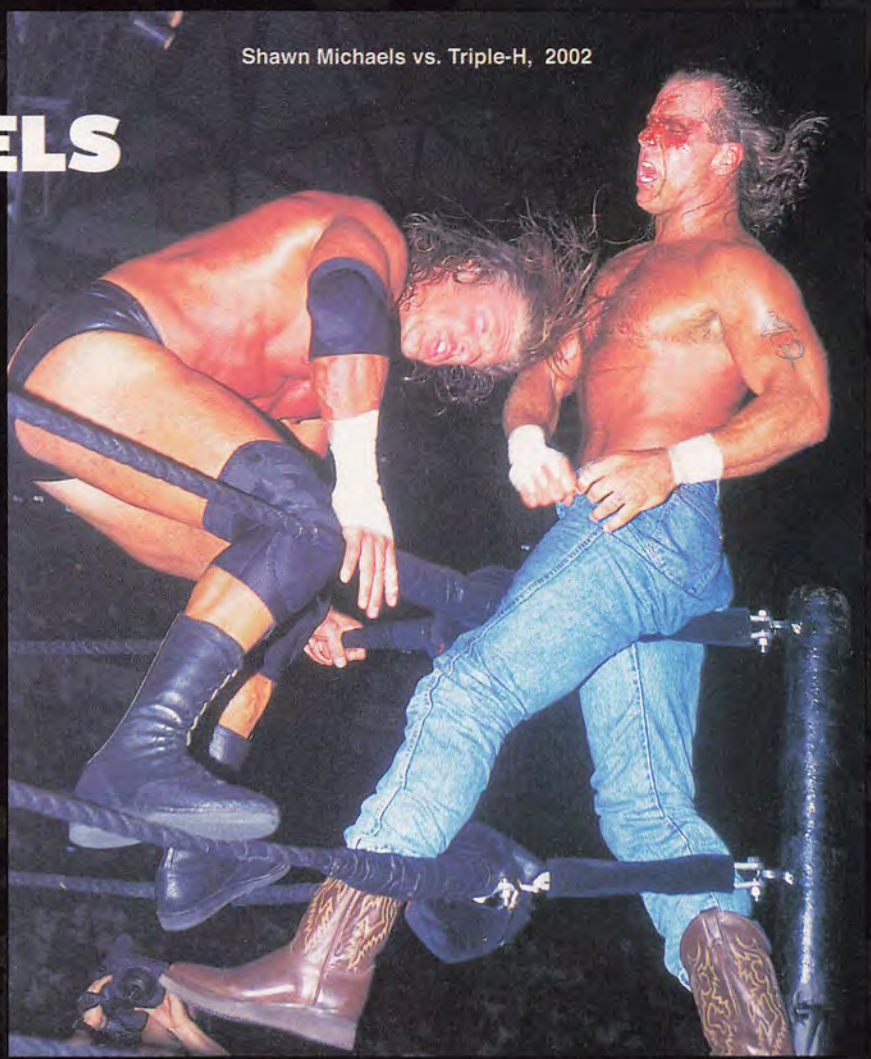
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *6-4-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

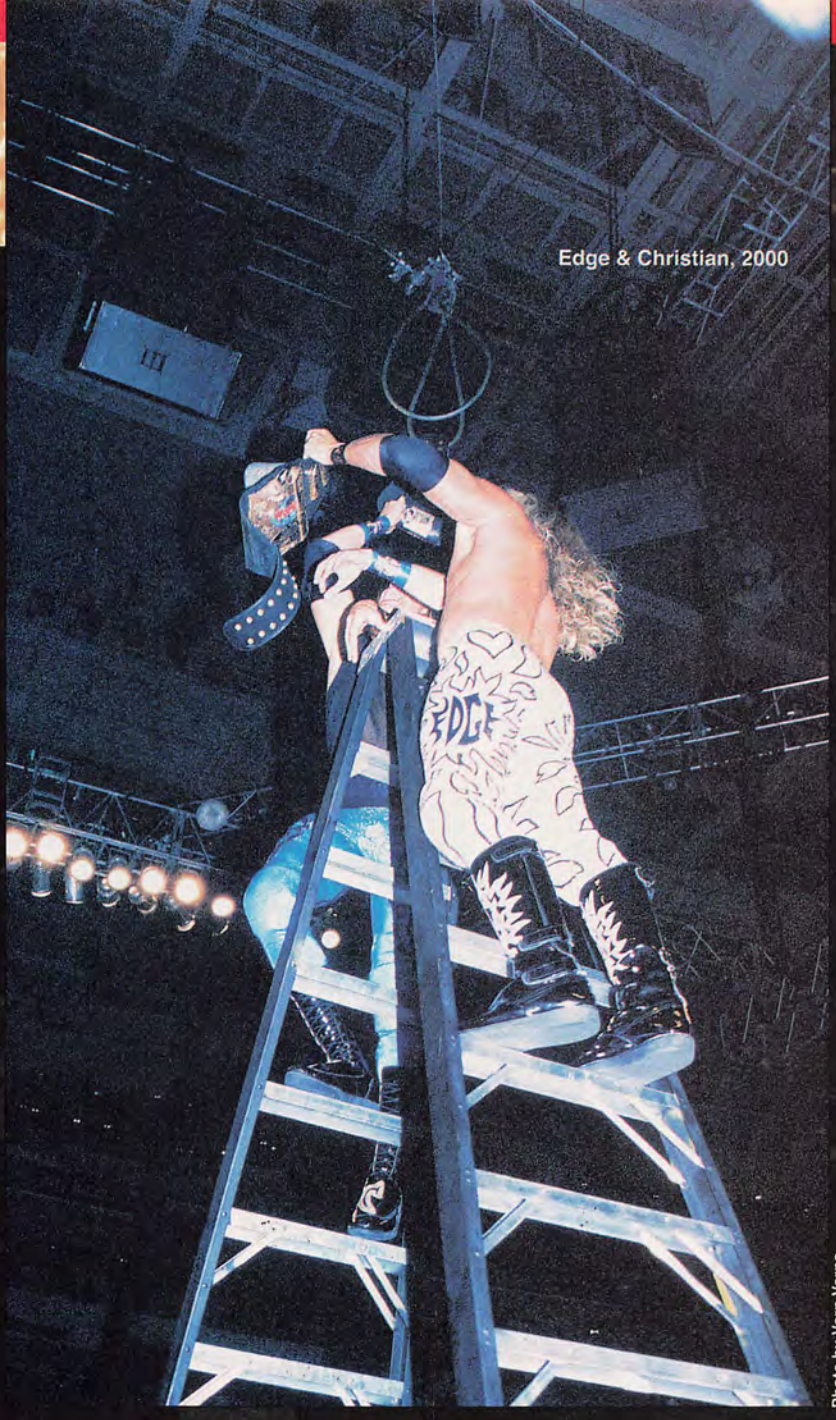
Teamed with Marty Jannetty in his first two SummerSlam bouts, in 1989 and 1990 ... Beat Razor Ramon in a rematch of their famous WrestleMania X ladder match in 1995 ... Retained the heavyweight title against Vader in 1996 ... Returned from a four-year hiatus to beat Triple-H in a streetfight in 2002.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

He may be known as "Mr. WrestleMania," but Michaels injected his patented blend of showmanship and athleticism into many a SummerSlam bout, as well. Perhaps that was never evident than when he carried a 52-year-old Hulk Hogan to one of the very best matches of his career in 2005.



Shawn Michaels vs. Triple-H, 2002



Edge & Christian, 2000

Photo by Vern Verna

3 EDGE

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *8-2*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Made his WWE pay-per-view debut at SummerSlam 1998 as Sable's mystery partner against Marc Mero & Jacqueline ... Teamed with Christian to win the very first Tables, Ladders, and Chairs match in 2000 ... Beat John Cena to retain the heavyweight title in 2006 ... Lost a Hell in a Cell bout to The Undertaker in 2008.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

SummerSlam was the backdrop for some of the most memorable moments in the storied career of the "Rated-R Superstar." Edge has won Intercontinental, tag team, and World title matches at SummerSlam, and competed in some hellacious specialty matches.

4 *The* UNDERTAKER

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *9-5-1*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Made his SummerSlam debut in 1992, beating Kamala by disqualification ... Defeated an impostor Undertaker in 1994 ... Lost the heavyweight title to Bret Hart in 1997 ... Scored his biggest SummerSlam win in 2008, when he beat arch-rival Edge in a Hell in a Cell bout.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

It's not quite 19-0, but it's not too shabby either. As WWE's most tenured wrestler, The Undertaker has competed in more SummerSlams than any other. However, many of his wins were in mid-card bouts, and he's never won a World title match on the show.

THE SummerSlam 50

1 Bret HART

SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *7-4*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Jim Neidhart in the first three SummerSlams, including in a tag title victory in 1990 ... Won the Intercontinental title from Mr. Perfect in a thrilling 1991 match ... Lost it to Davey Boy Smith in 1992's *PWI* Match of the Year ... Beat brother Owen Hart in a steel cage heavyweight title match in 1994 ... Won his fifth and final WWE heavyweight title from The Undertaker in 1997 ... Returned to SummerSlam in 2010 after a 13-year absence.

Bret Hart vs. The Undertaker, 1997

Photo by Bill Apter

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

Nobody has made more of the SummerSlam stage than "The Hitman." Whether competing in an opening tag team match, stealing the show in the mid-card, or headlining with the World title on the line, Hart consistently delivered a world-class effort at the summer's biggest wrestling show.

2 Hulk HOGAN

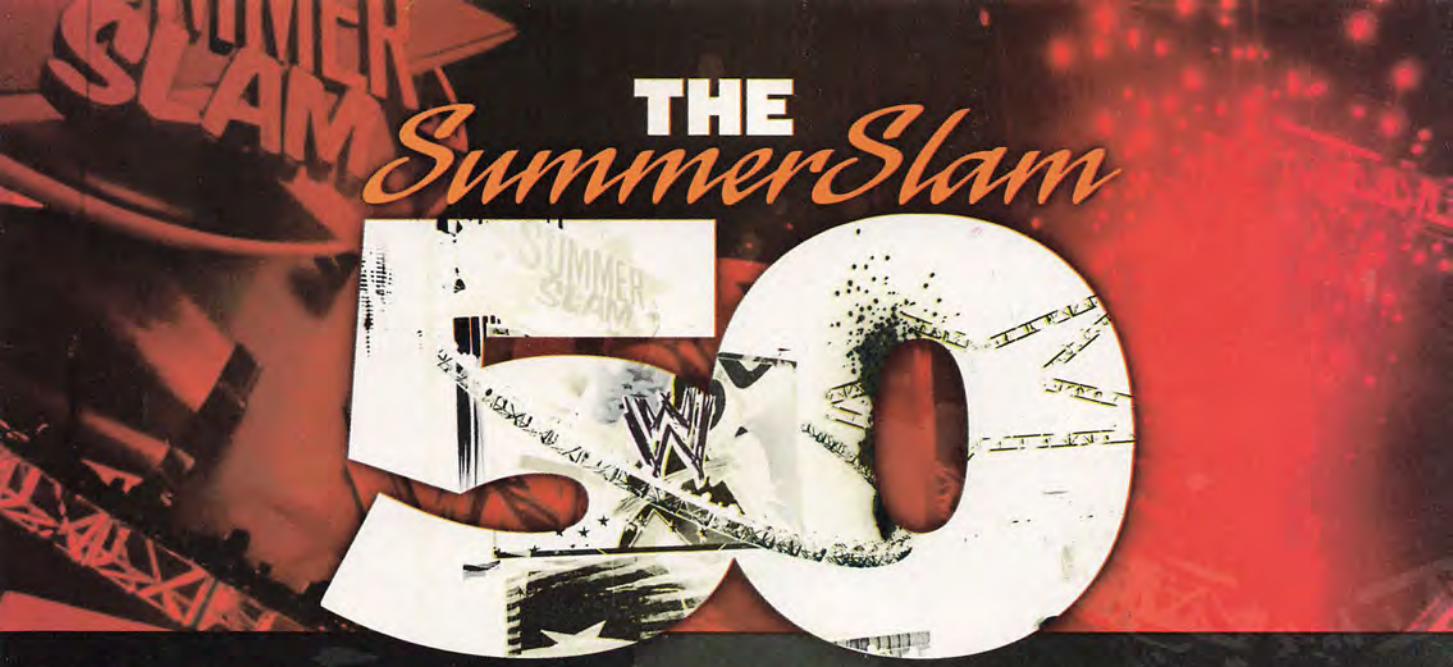
SUMMERSLAM RECORD: *6-0*

MOST SIGNIFICANT SUMMERSLAM MOMENTS:

Teamed with Randy Savage to defeat Ted DiBiase & Andre the Giant in the main event of the inaugural SummerSlam ... Returned in 2005 to beat Shawn Michaels after a 14-year hiatus from the event ... Competed in his last WWE match at SummerSlam 2006, beating Randy Orton.

SUMMERSLAM LEGACY:

The Undertaker may lay claim to the most prestigious streak in wrestling, but Hogan's undefeated record at SummerSlam is impressive in its own right. Strangely, although Hogan has competed in several epic matches at the August Classic, he has never wrestled in a World title match on the show.



A RANKING OF THE MEGASHOW'S ALL-TIME BEST PERFORMERS

Section Compiled By Al Castle

WRESTLEMANIA MAY BE the biggest event of the wrestling calendar, but for 23 years, another pay-per-view card has provided its own share of unforgettable moments and historic turning points.

From 1992's Match of the Year between Bret Hart and Davey Boy Smith, to the night Steve Austin was nearly paralyzed, to the epic battle between Shawn Michaels and Hulk Hogan, SummerSlam has earned a reputation for being the second-biggest wrestling card of the year. And on a few occasions, it's been the biggest.

Just as WrestleMania has made the careers of numerous competitors who have shined on its stage, SummerSlam, too, has seen several stars give the performance of a lifetime.

In the pages ahead, you'll read about the very best wrestlers ever to compete at SummerSlam and the magic moments they created—from career milestones to awe-inspiring maneuvers. These wrestlers competed for championships, honor, and even child custody rights. And—for at least one night each year—they've driven countless wrestling fans out of the hot August weather and into an air-conditioned room for some quality wrestling viewing.

The SummerSlam era started after the WrestleMania era, so it stands to reason that the greatest wrestlers of each era would be one and the same. But that's not the case. With SummerSlam being considered just a notch below WrestleMania on the gravity scale, several wrestlers who never would have been considered for main-event slots at WrestleMania have stood tall in some of SummerSlam's biggest matches.

That's not to say that SummerSlam's greatest performers have all made their mark at the top of the card. Some of the wrestlers listed made solid contributions at the mid-card level, which helped round out a SummerSlam event. In fact, several wrestlers who competed in main-event bouts at SummerSlam, including in world title matches, are not included in this list because their performances were entirely unremarkable.

Don't let the win-loss records fool you. In compiling this list, the *PWI* staff considered more than just wins and losses, although scoring several important victories at the show certainly helped. The quality and stakes of a match, a wrestler's overall talent, the performance in that match, and the match's place on the card all factored into a wrestler's ranking. That is why a Booker T, who went 0-5 at SummerSlam, is in the ranking.

Consideration was also given to notable involvement on a SummerSlam show in a non-wrestling capacity. After all, from extravagant weddings to a vicious right hook that unintentionally kayoed one wrestler's wife, some of SummerSlam's most memorable, and notorious, moments have come outside the confines of a sanctioned wrestling contest.

Have your own thoughts about who deserves to be ranked higher, lower, or not at all? Feel free to leave us your feedback on our Facebook page. Enjoy the list. And for God's sake, open a window. It's hot in here!

[Editor's note: For the sake of simplicity, the letters WWE will be used throughout this section eschewing at times the more historically accurate WWF abbreviation.]

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Larry Sweeney and Randy Savage tonight, the action in the ring could have gotten lost. Luckily, this is ROH, and the promotion has continued to treat us to some phenomenal action despite the general uncertainty about its future of late. ¶Main event saw current ROH champ Eddie Edwards (terrific young wrestler, lousy ring name) turn back previous champ Roderick Strong in about 25 minutes. An attack by The House of Truth set up—in a roundabout way—a showdown between Edwards and one of the greatest longtime ROH stars that has never captured the big belt in Davey Richards. My money is on Richards when he and Edwards meet.

SEATTLE, WA: Two shows in 24 hours, particularly one in the Central Time Zone and the other in the Pacific Northwest, is almost getting to be too much for a reporter with umpteen years about three times over logged on this beat. Add to that the fact that an old crony offered me a ticket to the Sunday matinee of the Mets-Yankees subway series that I had to decline and you might understand why I wasn't in the best frame of mind when I got to the Key Arena to cover WWE's Over the Limit, another PPV with a vague, meaningless name. ¶Least I might be able to say I saw a new WWE star in the making start his ascent. I didn't jump on the Ron Killings (R-Truth) bandwagon with so many others during the very early days of TNA, and I was surprised to see WWE sign him a couple of years back. Thought he went as far as he could with that rapping drivel. What do you know, it took just a couple of great efforts on *Raw* this spring for him to raise his stock in a major way. Frankly, I didn't know he had all this venom burning a hole in his insides, just waiting to ooze out. ¶Got himself a match with Rey Mysterio Jr. here and took full advantage. Hardly expected him to win clean over Rey, but win clean he did, then kicked Mysterio around a little more once it was over. Truth has lots of potential with what he has going now and a good bit of momentum, too. Strange things tend to happen to people on the way to the top of WWE, though. We've all seen it many times. Let's hope for his sake he plays this smart and doesn't get too full of himself.

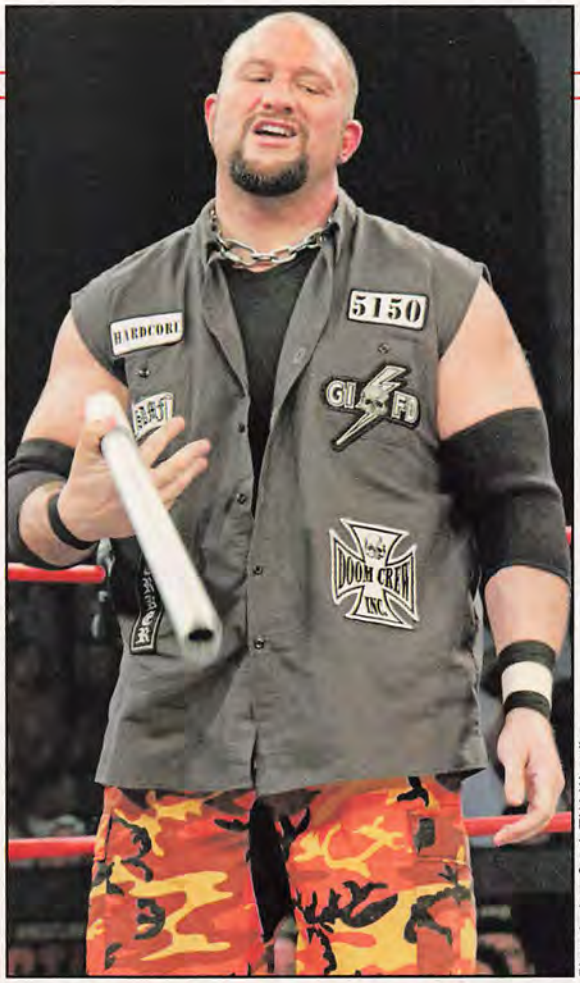

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

BULLY RAY: A TRULY DETESTABLE THROWBACK

JOPLIN, MO: These past couple of years, I've made a point of attending at least a handful of WWE and TNA house shows just to stay in synch with the roots of this crazy sport, if nothing else. No TV cameras usually means nothing of much importance happening when it comes to WWE and TNA. Kinda sad since the arena shows used to be the most important shows not too many years back. ¶Anyway, somehow I ended up in Joplin just 2½ weeks before the big tornado practically wiped out the city. Not much of importance went down at the TNA show. Only Bully Ray and AJ Styles made it worth the trip for me. Their match was real good, but what happened before it started stood out for me in a good way. Ray ran his mouth as per usual, targeting an overweight woman and this time even a little kid. Youngster ended up in tears by the time Ray was through running him down. Now, I'm not advocating wrestlers making kids cry. ¶Not at all. It's just that this took me back to an era when the baddest of the bad were *truly* bad in fans' eyes. They inspired real fear. Nowadays you see so many crowds full of kids who laugh at the big evildoers. Never did you see anyone laugh at Crusher or Killer Kowalski back in the day. Now it's all about enjoying the performance. Anyhow, it was nice to see an old-school approach work in 2011. And don't worry, Styles won the bout and made things all right by bringing the kid into the ring after it was over. I thought about him a lot after the tornado hit. Sure hope he and his family made it. □

plain speaking

With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

VOORHEES, NJ: Strange to be traveling here to South Jersey, to the practice facility of the NHL's Philadelphia Flyers, instead of further south to Delaware to watch the annual ECWA Super 8 Tournament. Turnout was a little disappointing, as many of the Delaware ECWA faithful clearly didn't make the trek. Wasn't strange to see Tommaso Ciampa in the tourney finals, though. He'd been there the past two years, and it was hard to say if it was admirable or something totally different of him to come back for a third straight shot at the big trophy. Either three strikes and you're out and maybe you look like a chump, or the third time is the charm, and it's a nice, warm and fuzzy story. ¶Well, warm and fuzzy won out on this late afternoon, and Ciampa was just a little better than he'd been in 2009 and 2010. Good for him, too, because the kid has an admirable intense presence to him and a nice style in the ring. He had to be damn good to beat three opponents of very different styles in Rich Swann, Shiima Xion, and a very determined Adam Cole. Also nice to see him briefly pay tribute to Jim Kettner, the long-time ECWA promoter who established the Super 8 and retired just last year after more than 40 years in the business. ¶Here's hoping this win leads to better things for Ciampa, just as it did for so many other Super 8 winners and standouts in years past. ¶On a side note, got my first look at a wrestling robot in this tournament in something or someone called Shockwave, who lost to Xion in the quarterfinals. Funny, but it looks oddly human once the bell rings. Hoping I don't get another look at any wrestling robot anytime soon.

Photo by George Tahinos

A ROBOT INVADES THE SUPER 8

CHICAGO, IL: The Ring of Honor universe (sarcasm fully intended) was still buzzing over the news that the company had been sold to the Sinclair Broadcasting Group. Some might say it was ironic that ROH was saved on the night some of the crazies out there thought the world was going to end around 6 p.m. Good thing it didn't because it would have wiped out this card. I'll leave it to Saks and Burkett and whoever else is on our business beat to sort out this Sinclair stuff in detail for you elsewhere, but suffice to say it seems like great news for a promotion that seemed to be collectively slumping against the ropes. ¶With all that and the sad salutes to both

Photo by Duane Long

Kai takes a kick to the chest from Wendi Richter, whom she defeated for the WWF Women's championship in 1985. Kai also held the WWF's Women's tag team title with Judy Martin as The Glamour Girls.

glamour girls, and that's where the name came from. We pitched it to Pat Patterson and they let us do it."

The WWF brought in the team of Noriyo Tateno and Itsuki Yamazaki, The Jumping Bomb Angels, and the feud between The Glamour Girls and the Angels proved to be a crowd-pleaser, introducing American fans to a new style of women's wrestling. The WWF even instituted a women's tag team title due to the popularity of the feud.

After two runs as tag team champions, the title was deactivated, and by 1990, Kai had left the WWF. The Glamour Girls resurfaced in the short-lived Ladies Professional Wrestling Association, where they won the title in 1991. A few years later, Kai received a surprise call from the WWF, inviting her to face Alundra Blayze for the Women's title at WrestleMania X.

"I hadn't wrestled in quite a while, and I had suffered some burns from a gas grill accident," she said. "I was 35 years old. I didn't think I could be ready. I said, 'If we're going to do this, I'm going to need some practice.' They sent Alundra and me everywhere for a month before WrestleMania. It was so stressful. But the match went very well. Once we got out there, it wasn't scary anymore."

Kai failed to regain the championship that night, but she went on to collect more gold in subsequent years, winning the NWA Mid-Atlantic Women's title, the PGWA title, and the NWA Women's title. She also competed in both WCW and TNA, and won the prestigious All Japan Women's Pro Wrestling All Pacific title.

But in recent years, Kai vanished from wrestling. "Around 2004, I just wanted to get away from everybody," she said. "I had some things I wanted to take care of. I was working at a plantation house, helping to take care of the place. I spent some time down in the Everglades, fishing and hunting wild boar. I never even did a magazine interview until now; I'm a very private, old-school person. I'm not a big star. I just wanted to get my matches over. But I realized how much I missed wrestling."

Kai had lost contact with most of her wrestling peers. She had not been following wrestling, and had not heard of the death of Moolah or Sensational Sherri Martel until long after they occurred. She has recently begun re-connecting with the wrestling business through social media, and has also begun training wrestlers. She plans to open her own wrestling school in Nashville, Tennessee.

"I would really like to give back. I would like to teach," she said. "I would like to pass on the things I have learned and to treat my students better than I was treated when I was breaking in." □

Photo by Special Events

In the latter stages of her career, Kai spent time on the indy circuit battling the likes of San Antonio Rose in the PGWA, where she held that promotion's championship.

whatever happened to...

By Dan Murphy

LEILANI KAI

ONLY ONE WRESTLER who competed at the first WrestleMania returned to Madison Square Garden a decade later to compete at WrestleMania X.

It wasn't Hulk Hogan. It wasn't Paul Orndorff, Tito Santana, or Roddy Piper (though he did make an appearance at WM X).

It was Leilani Kai.

"I had no idea that WrestleMania would be the extravaganza it was. I had just come back from Japan, and I didn't know anything about it. I didn't know it was going to be on closed-circuit; they just said it was going to be televised around the world," Kai said. "I had no idea what I was walking into. Suddenly, I'm backstage and Liberace is waving to me. It was the greatest night of my life."

Though she didn't realize it at the time, Leilani Kai (born Patricia Schroeder) was to become a featured part of one of the biggest events in pro wrestling history.

One month earlier, on February 18, 1985, the 25-year-old Kai had defeated Wendi Richter to win the WWF Women's championship. Her mentor, The Fabulous Moolah, seconded Kai while Richter had pop music superstar Cyndi Lauper in her corner. The WWF was exploding in popularity, thanks to the Rock 'n' Wrestling Connection tie-ins with the fledgling MTV network, and Kai—a low-key girl from Florida—suddenly found herself on the national stage.

Schroeder discovered wrestling as a girl when her uncle took her to a wrestling card in Fort Myers, Florida. "I saw Bonnie Watson and Sherri Lee, and I was hooked right away," she said. "I knew I wanted to wrestle. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. At school, I would doodle little wrestling rings in my notebooks."

She eventually met wrestlers Susan Green and Ann Casey, and after graduating from high school in Tampa, she moved to Columbia, South Carolina, to train under Moolah.

"I trained for two weeks, then was booked in Alaska for two weeks, then I went to work for Nick Gulas in Tennessee, then I got to work for Vince McMahon Sr. for the first time. I had only been working for three months and I was still kind of green," she said.

With Schroeder's dark hair and exotic features, Moolah thought had a unique look and gave her the name Leilani Kai, billing her as "The Hawaiian Princess." With her athleticism, work ethic, and unique persona, Kai traveled the world, wrestling against other Moolah-trained women, and she found herself in the right place at the right time for the first WrestleMania.

Kai lost that match to Richter, but she later reinvented herself as a tag team specialist as one-half of The Glamour Girls with Judy Martin. "I had wrestled in Japan a lot and I told Jimmy Hart I would like to bring in some Japanese girls for a change of style," she said. "I thought we could do some tag team matches and Judy and I offered to dye our hair blonde. Jimmy said we would look like a couple of

Photo by Brittany Burkett

After stepping away from the wrestling business for a few years, "The Hawaiian Princess" Leilani Kai is currently training wrestlers and intends to open her own training school in Nashville.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

JEFF JARRETT 361

capsule profile 361

JEFF JARRETT

BORN IN Hendersonville, Tennessee, on July 14, 1967 ... Gravitated toward pro wrestling while in high school ... His father, Jerry, owned and operated Tennessee-based Continental Wrestling Association ... Grandfather, Eddie Marlin, was also a pro wrestler ... Refereed matches in CWA starting in early-1986 ... Trained under his father and Tojo Yamamoto ... Made pro debut at age 18 against Tony Falk ... While still a referee, was challenged by Falk ... Match ended in a 10-minute draw ... In 1989, Jerry Jarrett purchased World Class Championship Wrestling and merged it with the CWA to create the United States Wrestling Association ... Went on to become one of the USWA's most decorated wrestlers, winning the Southern heavyweight title 10 times ... Feuded with most of the top heels in the territory, including Eddie and Doug Gilbert, Brian Christopher, Tom Pritchard, Tommy Rich, and Vampire Warrior ... Also held the USWA tag team title15 times ... Partners included Matt Bourne, Jeff Gaylord, Cody Michaels, Robert Fuller, and Jerry Lawler ... Shed "pretty boy" image while teaming with Lawler during violent feud with The Moondogs in 1992 that was voted *PWI's* Feud of the Year ... Signed with the WWF in 1993 ... Debuted as "Double-J," a country singer looking to elevate his career ... Feuded briefly with Bret Hart ... Beat Razor Ramon at the 1995 Royal Rumble to win the Intercontinental title ... Unsuccessfully challenged World champion Diesel ... Was joined by The Roadie, who ran interference during his matches ... Won second I-C title in controversial match with Bob Holly, after which title was held up ... Lost, then regained title from Ramon, making him a three-time champion ... Dropped I-C belt to Shawn Michaels at In Your House 2 ... Departed WWF, after which it was revealed that the "hit" song he supposedly sang, "With My Baby Tonight," was actually recorded by The Roadie ... Signed one-year deal with WCW in 1996 ... Briefly joined The Four Horsemen ... Won the U.S. title from Dean Malenko, then lost it to Steve

Jeff Jarrett executes his Stroke maneuver on arch-rival Kurt Angle.

McMichael ... Returned to WWF in late-1997 ... Beat Barry Windham for the vacant NWA North American title ... Formed alliance with Jim Cornette ... Reprised country music gimmick, with Tennessee Lee (Robert Fuller) as manager ... Later took on Debra McMichael as valet ... Lost hair-vs.-hair match to X-Pac ... Won WWF tag title with Owen Hart, defeating Big Boss Man and Ken Shamrock ... Lost title to Kane and X-Pac, days before Hart was killed in an accident at Over the Edge ... Beat D'Lo Brown to merge the I-C and European titles ... Lost I-C title to Chyna at No Mercy and left the company ... Returned to WCW in late-1999 ... Formed NWO 2000 with Bret Hart, Nash, and Hall ... Beat Dallas Page for the WCW World title ... Lost it in bizarre tag match that saw actor David Arquette become champ ... Regained title and traded it twice during feud with Ric Flair ... Laid down and was pinned by Hulk Hogan at Bash at the Beach in a phony title match, then lost real WCW title to Booker T ... Founded TNA with father Jerry in '02 ... Beat Ron Killings to win the NWA title, with help from Vince Russo ... Lost it to AJ Styles, but won it back shortly after ... Would hold title on six occasions ... Feuded with Styles, Raven, and Sting ... Took hiatus from TNA ... Wife Jill died of breast cancer in May 2007, at age 38 ... Voted Most Inspirational Wrestler of the Year by *PWI* readers ... Aligned with Samoa Joe upon return ... Began rivalry with Kurt Angle after Angle made remarks about Jarrett's family ... Suspended from TNA when it was learned he was dating Angle's estranged wife, Karen ... Returned in late-'09 ... Repeatedly humiliated by Eric Bischoff, who forced him to perform various tasks to earn his way back onto the roster ... Aligned with Hogan, joining Team Hogan at Lockdown to defeat Team Flair ... Questioned the motives of Sting, who brutally assaulted him ... Returned from injury to cost Sting his World title against Rob Van Dam at Slammiversary VIII ... Turned against Samoa Joe and the fans ... Beat Joe by submission thanks to help from security officials Gunner and Murphy ... Adopted new MMA persona and began challenging other wrestlers to exhibition matches ... Renewed rivalry with Angle ... Reintroduced Karen as his new wife ... Beat Angle in an "Ultra Male Rules" match at Lockdown, with help from Karen ... Bitter feud shows no signs of ending anytime soon. □

Scott Steiner, Christopher-Michinoku.
Aug. 1998: WrestleMania XIV: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Sunny, Curt Hennig, Dan Severn, Ultimo Dragon.
Sept. 1998: Power Surge! While The NWO Fiddles ... These Men Are Burning. Also: Sable, Ultimo-Guerrero, DeGeneration X-Owen, Rocky Maivia, Mad Russian-Rambo.
Oct. 1998 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Steve Austin, Taka Michinoku, Al Snow, Hollywood Hogan, Roddy Piper, Misawa-Kawada.
Nov. 1998: Austin vs. Goldberg: Who Would Win And Why. Also: Bret Hart, Dude Love, Junkyard Dog, Helmsley-Michaels, Ray-Booker.
Dec. 1998: DDP's Big Bang Theories: Cutting Loose On Life, Love, & The Ultimate Buzz. Also: Sable-Jackie, Mankind, Hogan-Horace, D-Lo, APW.
Holiday 1998 (Special Issue): Kane: Still Haunted By His Day Of Glory. Also: Eddie Guerrero, Stevie Ray, Val Venis, Turnbuckle Turkey Awards, bonus calendar.
Jan. 1999: Seasons Greetings With A Bang (DDP & Kimberly). Also: Severn-Shamrock, Konnan, Arn, Undertaker-Kane, Chris Jericho.
March 1999: Estrange Situation! Insider Reveals: "Shane Still Resents His Father! Also: X-Pac, Hogan-Warrior, Jesse Ventura, Billy Kidman, Scott Norton.
April 1999 (Special Issue): The 1999 Inside Wrestling Computer Tournament. Also: Bossman-McMahon, Steiner & Bischoff, Hollywood Hogan, Wrath, Blue Meanie.
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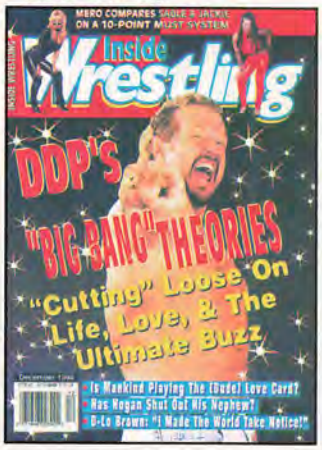
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realize that Michael Cole's rants against Eve and some of the other Divas this spring were meant to turn up the heat on him, but there was some truth to what he said there if you could look past the obnoxiousness of his delivery.

Sad to say that pretty much all Divas matches do feel a whole lot like filler on WWE shows these days, and keep in mind that this is coming from someone who has taken in quite a few Women Superstars Uncensored shows in New Jersey over the past few years and enjoyed them immensely. I really believe the Divas should be featured prominently on WWE cards. I just want it to feel meaningful.

Photo By George Napolitano

One way to make Divas matches more meaningful, says Lenker, is to latch the Divas on to male wrestlers. But does Gail Kim, who has been linked to Daniel Bryan in the past, really need him to showcase her ability?

Truth be told, the current Divas roster is relatively strong if you judge it strictly on talent and potential. Beth Phoenix can be and has been terrific in the past. I often forget that Gail Kim is still employed by WWE, but she is more than good enough to anchor the division. Natalya and Melina have shown me a lot in the past, too. And I keep wondering if Maryse's face should be plastered on the sides of milk cartons so that we could all find out where she has been. I once thought she had Stratus-like potential, and not that long ago, either.

Eve, Alicia Fox, Kelly Kelly, Rosa Mendes, the Bellas, et al. feel like secondary players to me, but they all have earned spots on the roster.

Sometime over the past 12 to 18 months, Vince McMahon, perhaps unconsciously, seemingly stopped believing in the division, and that's significant because I don't think McMahon has ever believed much in the Divas' ability to draw ratings and earn big money on their own. You know the drill on this kind of chicken-and-egg thing. It's gotta be hard for the division to gain momentum if WWE isn't going to get fully behind it, but WWE isn't going to get fully behind it until it feels that it is deserved. And now, in these non-edgy PG times, there are no cheap thrills to be had with bra-and-panties matches and the like.

Okay, the truth is that even in the Trish and Lita halcyon days, the Divas rarely received extended time for matches, so things haven't changed in that respect. It's just that this is starting to remind me of the waning days of the WWE cruiserweight division. It was a division that once found a niche among the land of the giants but eventually died a quiet, barely noticeable death.

Strangely enough, I think the best way to start to fix this mess might be to involve more of the Divas in the feuds of their male counterparts. If Gail Kim is tied to The Miz, maybe Eve helps out Randy Orton and the matches between Gail and Eve become more compelling. Maybe create another Vickie Guerrero this way, but one with wrestling skill. Not exactly a novel idea, but it could be a beginning. Well, that and maybe do the almost unthinkable and scour the indies for seasoned female talent.

But let's not wait until October 21 to get started on these repairs. If the Rapture is coming, let's hope it's just a creative name for a new Diva. □

on the road

With Dave Lenker

SO WHERE WERE *you* at 6:00 p.m. on May 21, 2011? On the exact moment that the world did *not* come to an end 18 hours into that non-fateful day, I was, *um,* I don't remember for certain. I just know that I woke up that Saturday morning, heard no reports of Armageddon from any other areas of the world that are a few time zones ahead of us on the East Coast of the United States, and shrugged it all off.

I think it might have been around 7:30 that night that it actually dawned on me that we were all still around, that things were more or less status quo. Okay then.

I know we might have another date with our dastardly destiny come October 21, but I will likely pay about as much attention to that as I did at 6:00 p.m. on May 21. Despite the best efforts of those believers whom I noticed hanging out on the streets of Center City Philadelphia during the days leading up to the big non-event, I haven't even followed the hows and the whys of all this end-of-the-world stuff, to be honest. Maybe I have been ignoring all the signs or warnings all along. Patience, please, as there is a big wrestling point to be made here. It struck me as odd that while the world as we know it remained pretty much intact during the last weekend before Memorial Day, might we have been witnessing the total collapse of the women's division in WWE around the same time? If not, *should* we be witnessing it?

The signs did seem to be there. I read online commentary in months past from other wrestling pundits lamenting the state of the division. Then Michelle McCool retired after Extreme Rules. And then Layla announced she had a torn ACL and a torn MCL that looked like they would put her on the shelf until 2012. And then the highly unofficial savior of the division, Kharma, the scary, almost demonic force previously known as Awesome Kong, after having terrorized most of the Divas with her random attacks for weeks, took her leave because of all things, she found out she was pregnant?

A pregnant Diva on top of all the rest? The demon seed of the demonic Kharma? Cue the creepy end-of-the-world music, maestro. This mini-apocalypse must be upon us.

Really, though, there have been other signs, the most obvious of which was the fact that at WrestleMania this spring, the Divas champion (Eve) could only manage a brief backstage snippet with The Rock, while the only women's action on the four-hour show was a short six-person match in which two of the four female participants were a mostly retired former Diva (Trish Stratus) and a reality show star (Snooki). What does that say about the lack of star power of the woman with the gold at the time? At least things improved (not) on that end when Brie Bella upset Eve for the title shortly after WrestleMania. Wasn't it just a few months back that Brie mostly played the part of eye candy hanging on the arm of the latest male *Raw* guest host du jour? But hey, that switcheroo bit she always plays with twin sister Nikki never gets old, right?

Long gone, I am afraid, are the glory days of Trish, Lita, Victoria, and even Mickie James, and okay, maybe it's not exactly fair to expect any crop of Divas to measure up to that core group of the Attitude Era. I

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Current WWE Divas champion Brie Bella (on right) has gone from garnish for guest hosts like Toby Keith to standard-bearer for the division. Dave Lenker says it's no wonder female wrestling in WWE is in a lull.

data sheet

THE BIG SHOW

HEIGHT: 7'
WEIGHT: 485
HOMETOWN: Tampa, Florida
GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: November 14, 1999—The Big Show won his first WWE world title at Survivor Series '99, with a dominant showing against The Rock and Triple-H in a triple-threat match. Show—who had reigned as WCW World champion less than four years earlier—was a last-minute replacement for the injured Steve Austin, and became one of only five men at the time to have held WWF and WCW world title gold (along with Hulk Hogan, Ric Flair, Randy Savage, and Kevin Nash). The win cemented The Big Show as a force in WWE and a top player for years to come.
HE DOES IT SO WELL: Overpowers opponents. The Big Show's power is unparalleled. His knockout punch—paired with the extra-large wingspan that only a seven-footer can possess—makes this move the most effective finisher in wrestling today. To date, nobody has kicked out after being punched by Show, and that includes The Undertaker, John Cena, and Chris Jericho.
WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Conditioning. Early in his career, The Big Show was pretty much indestructible because, in addition to being one of the most powerful men in the sport, he had enough speed and agility to keep up with men who were less than half his size. Over the years, however, Show has battled weight issues that have limited his ability to move around the ring effectively.
PET FINISHERS: Weapon of Mass Destruction (right-handed punch), chokeslam.
BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: August 15, 2010. For weeks, CM Punk and his Straight Edge Society cohorts had been antagonizing The Big Show. At SummerSlam 2010 Show would have an opportunity to get his revenge in a three-on-one handicap match versus Punk, Luke Gallows, and Joey Mercury. Show was definitely up for the challenge and took out the S.E.S. with ease.
OUTLOOK: At 39, his days of being a perennial World title contender are most likely behind him. In the past two years, Show has become a dependable and effective tag team partner for a variety of wrestlers, and that seems to suit him fine.
QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "The Big Show can be your best friend or your worst enemy, but I always recommend to people they try their hardest to stay on his good side. It just makes life in WWE a whole lot easier."

–Rey Mysterio Jr.

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data sheet

TARA

HEIGHT: 5'8"
WEIGHT: 155
HOMETOWN: Los Angeles, California
GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: October 10, 2010—Tara defeated Angelina Love, Madison Rayne, and Velvet Sky in a four corners match at Bound for Glory to win her fourth TNA Knockouts championship. Tara's interaction with special guest referee Mickie James led to a feud between the former WWE rivals.
SHE DOES IT SO WELL: Whether she's trading moves with Sarita or matching James' intensity, Tara has a wealth of experience that allows her to dial up the correct approach no matter whom she's facing.
WHERE SHE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Tara needs to better control her emotions. Just last year, for example, she allowed herself to be goaded into a retirement match with Madison Rayne, and was subsequently banished from TNA for several months. Tara needs to rely more on her head and less on her heart.
PET FINISHERS: Spider's Web (sit-down inverted front powerslam), Widow's Peak (Gory neckbreaker).
BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: July 19, 2009. Tara had possession of the Knockouts championship for just two weeks when Love defeated her at Victory Road. Tara's foot was on the bottom rope when Love pinned her, but referee Slick Johnston didn't see it. Tara must have wondered if coming to TNA was a wise move at that point.
OUTLOOK: Tara's future can be whatever she makes of it. She will almost certainly have to contend with Rayne and Love at some point in order to get a shot at James' Knockouts title. She has the skills and experience to beat any woman on the Knockouts roster, but she must steer clear of pointless feuds that sidetrack her.
QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "Obviously, I don't like Tara very much, but I do respect her. She's had a great career, and she's a very skilled wrestler. It's a shame she's so screwed up in the head, though. We'd probably make good tag team partners."
—Mickie James

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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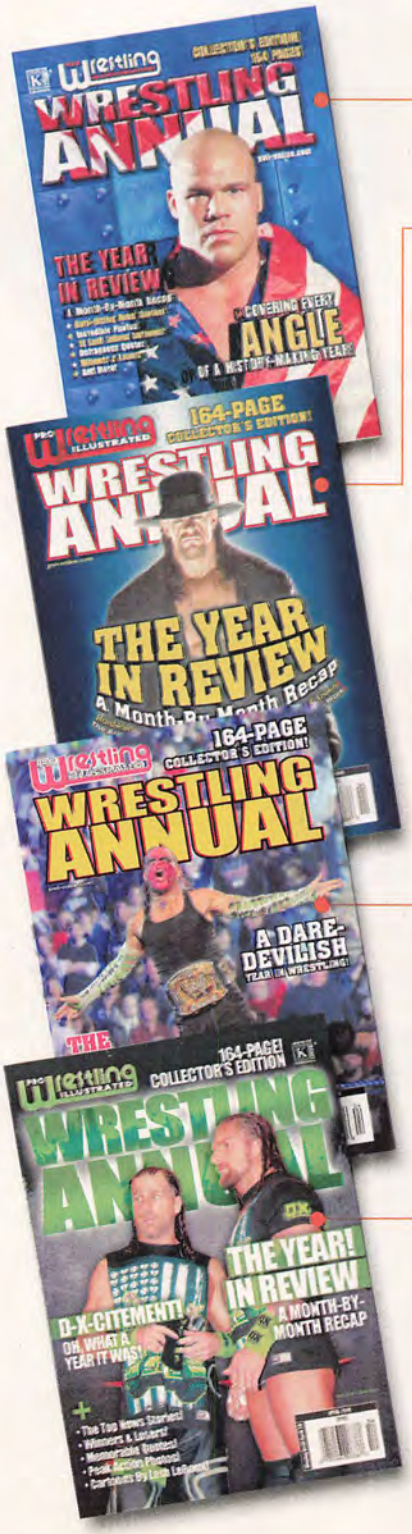

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Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

turing his first UFC heavyweight title in 2009.

Ric Flair is in legal trouble—again! A warrant was issued for Flair's arrest after his failure to comply with a court order requiring him to re-pay Highspots a $35,000 loan and sign 300 autographs. If Flair fails to meet those conditions by the end of July, he could face up to 90 days in jail. His agent described the issue as a "simple business dispute." If you remember, Flair began doing business with Highspots soon after his faux retirement match against **Shawn Michaels** at WrestleMania 24 and his subsequent departure from WWE.

Although TNA has enjoyed great success with its live tours of the United Kingdom, **Sting**—believe it or not—has never participated in those events despite his long association with the company. But that's going to change, as the World champion is advertised as part of the 2012 Maximum Impact IV tour from January 26 to 28. Tour stops include Nottingham, Manchester, and London. *Impact Wrestling* recently scored its highest rating ever on Britain's Challenge TV. Among other stars advertised for the tour are **Kurt Angle**, **AJ Styles**, **Samoa Joe**, **Mr. Anderson**, and **Velvet Sky**.

Interestingly, one of Sting's great triumphs was his defeat of **Big Van Vader** for the WCW World title in London back in 1993. He lost the belt back to Vader six days later in Dublin, Ireland.

News from the Elite Pro Wrestling Alliance: Where's **Sonjay Dutt**? Well, we found him in West Virginia, where he defended the Elite Pro cruiserweight title against **"Wildman" Robbie Paige** in a breathtaking encounter that went to a 30-minute draw ... Heavyweight champion **Vince Vega** has hired 6'8", 300-pound **Jaysin Justice** to be his new bodyguard. Justice helped "The Final Verdict" retain his belt against masked Japanese wrestler **Sasian Kwon** ... This thriving indy has sold out its last four events as of press time.

This 'n' that: **Phill Shatter**—better known as **Gunner**—has vacated the SAW International title due to his increasing commitments in TNA ... **Cobian** overcame the outside interference of **Zachary Shane** to defeat **Tyler Hilton** for the Maryland Championship Wrestling title ... Longtime indy standout **Cindy Rogers** has announced that she will retire this summer. She beat **Jamilia Craft** at a recent ECWA event in Newark, Delaware ... Ring of Honor champion **Eddie Edwards** enjoyed two successful title defenses recently, defeating **Chris Hero** on May 7 in Toronto and **Roderick Strong** on May 21 in Chicago Ridge, Illinois.

From the Managerial Abuse Dept.: **Derrick King** has outraged Showtime All-Star Wrestling officials and fans alike with his new TV segment, "The Amazing Feats Of **Johnny Bandana**." The segment is allegedly supposed to highlight Bandana's unusual talents and survival skills. Unfortunately, the stunts usually turn out to be outright abuse, including the first segment in which King and his main squeeze, **Sister O'Feelya**, placed Bandana in two trash cans and rolled him down the hill at the state capitol in Nashville. King and his other charge, **"Teen Heartthrob" Drew Haskins**, blame Bandana for their loss of the SAW tag team belts to **Christian Jacobs** and **Jon Michael Worthington** back in January.

That's all for now. Save a ringside seat for me. □

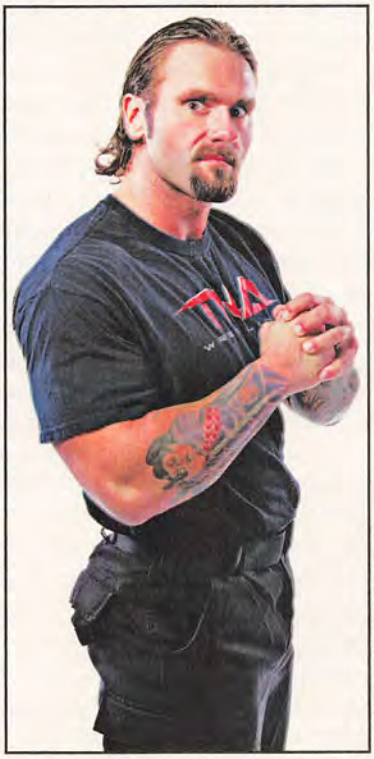

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

Gunner's totally committed to TNA

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Christian proved he's every bit Randy Orton's equal

derous powerslam. Orton hesitated before going for a potentially career-ending punt to the head, giving Christian just enough time to unleash a spear. Orton countered the Killswitch and Christian blocked an RKO, but then Orton back-flipped over Christian to plant him with a solid RKO and score the pinfall after 16 minutes of action.

Christian might have lost the match, but he demonstrated to everyone that he wasn't merely a veteran that was satisfied with a World title nod of approval and a fade into the sunset. He established himself as a main-event staple of the Smackdown brand.

WWE champion **John Cena's** title defense against The Miz was the chaotic confrontation that one would expect. Cena took some brutal punishment, getting whacked with **Alex Riley's** briefcase, landing mouth-first onto the guardrail, and getting caned by a kendo stick. The Miz constantly taunted the kids in the audience that comprised Cena's PG fanbase. Miz seemed to have recaptured the WWE title after having Riley play a bogus recording of Cena saying "I quit" on the sound system, but the match was restarted, and Cena used the STF to force the former champ into submission at the 23-minute mark.

In other bouts at Over the Limit, **Jerry Lawler** beat **Michael Cole** in a Kiss My Foot match with the help of former KMF foe **Bret Hart** ... Divas champion **Brie Bella** defeated **Kelly Kelly**, thanks to some clever teamwork with sister **Nikki Bella** ... WWE World tag team champions **The Big Show** and **Kane** powered through **CM Punk** and **Mason Ryan** ... **Sin Cara** pinned **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** ... Intercontinental champion **Wade Barrett** beat former **Corre** running buddy **Ezekiel Jackson** ... **R-Truth** scored a clean pinfall over **Rey Mysterio Jr.**

NEWS ANALYSIS

CALL IT KHARMA. Some pundits have criticized WWE Creative's decision to break from the Kharma character and reveal her pregnancy, instead of explaining her absence with a storyline injury. I applaud Creative's choice. There isn't a conflict in believing that a 275-pound-plus woman who rips the heads off Barbie dolls could become pregnant. The merging of the real and unreal is what makes pro wrestling uniquely intriguing.

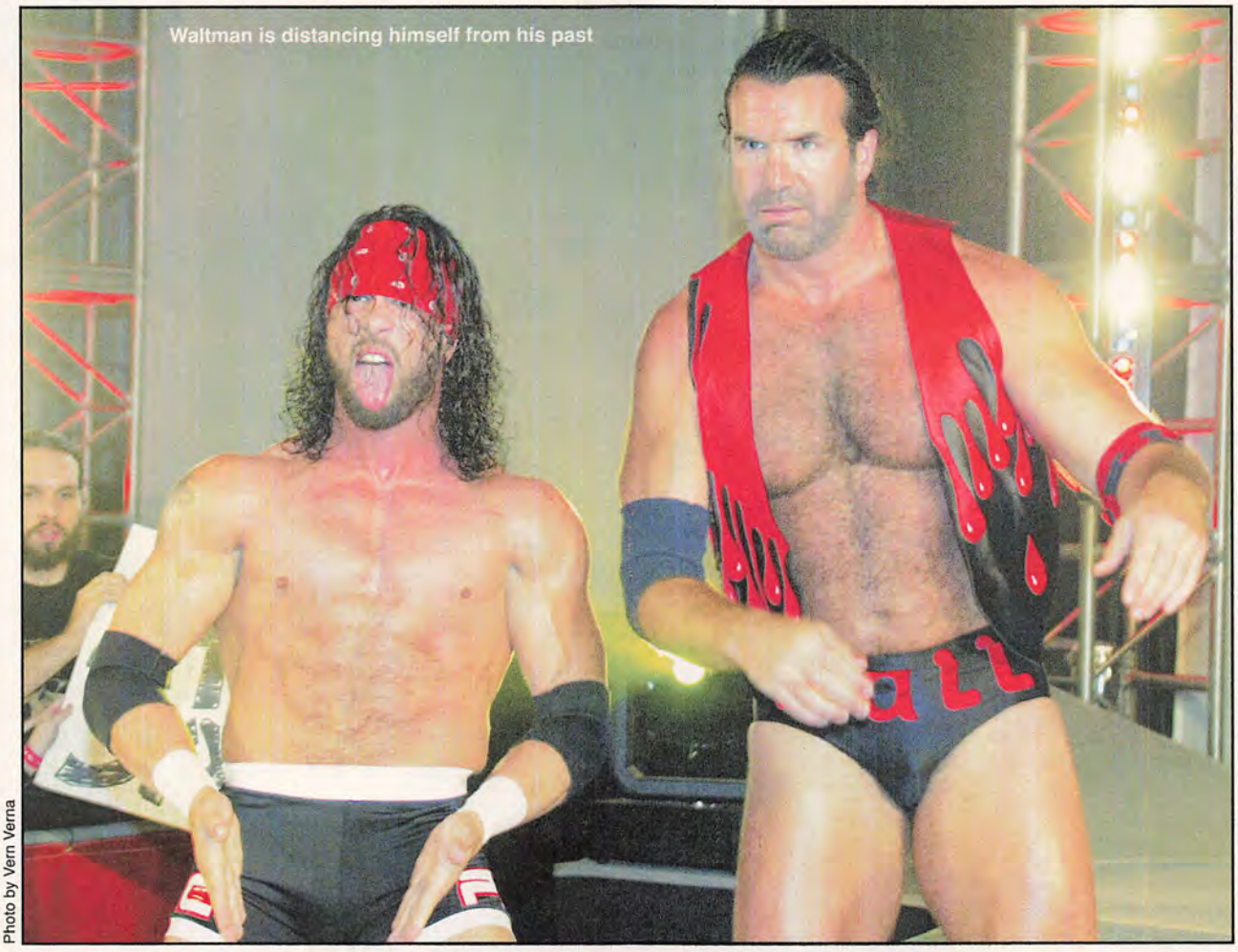
SHOOTING FROM THE LIP. I've admired many outspoken wrestlers—including Jesse Ventura, Bill Goldberg, and Scott Steiner—over the years, not so much for what they say (because they're often trashing the business), but for the courage it takes to say it. Chris Jericho could stay in everyone's good graces with press-release-friendly answers, but he gives his honest opinions. Good for him.

AS EASY AS 1-2-3. I'm glad to see Sean Waltman rekindling his interest in pro wrestling, because it's where he belongs. This sort of Hollywood/entertainment underground where he's been for the past several years hasn't worked out well for him. When you see where his old running mate, Scott Hall, is at this point in his life, it would be great to see Sean make the most of this opportunity.

CHRISTIAN CHARITY? The fact that Christian's World title victory back in May was met by a collective yawn should have been expected, considering it came across as a "thank you" to Christian and Edge's contributions to WWE in light of Edge being forced to vacate the championship due to his retirement. But, at Over the Limit, Christian seized the moment and demanded respect—and, this time, he earned it.

NO FLAIR FOR FINANCE. Does Ric Flair have a business manager? From a hurricane wiping out one of his uninsured gyms several years ago to his latest mess with Highspots, Flair always remains in financial turmoil despite the millions he has earned over the years. And he once started a business called Ric Flair Finance! It's no surprise that went belly-up.

UFC President **Dana White** confirmed that former heavyweight champ **Brock Lesnar** underwent successful surgery to correct his latest issue with diverticulitis, which results in pouches forming outside the colon. "They removed about 12 inches of his colon," said White on the *Prelims Live* portion of UFC 130. "Repaired it, put it back together. All they had to do was make some incisions in his stomach." He added that Lesnar would be in discomfort and relegated to a liquid diet for some time. Lesnar hopes to return to the UFC by early-2012. He is very eager for a rematch against current champion **Cain Velasquez**. Lesnar had his first bout with diverticulitis three months after cap-



Waltman is distancing himself from his past

Photo by Vern Verna

it was tough having to miss WrestleMania 27.

Sean Waltman is trying to get back in the game—at least in some capacity. Not much has been heard from the groundbreaking light heavyweight formerly known as X-Pac and The 1-2-3 Kid since reports surfaced three years ago that he had tried to hang himself in his Mexico City apartment. While Waltman claimed that it was a mixture of alcohol and antidepressants that led to his suicide attempt, his plight inspired **Kevin Nash** and **Triple-H** to recommend that former WWE superstars be offered free drug and alcohol rehabilitation even when they're no longer employed by the company.

Waltman is embracing social media with his new website, realxpac.com, as well as through Facebook and Twitter, and sounding off on the latest developments in the wrestling world. He has acknowledged his past mistakes, saying, "I know I've done some bad things in my life, a lot of things I'm very sorry for."

He is obviously putting forth a kinder, wiser, and cleaned-up image of himself. He is even shooting a documentary about his experiences titled *The Price Of Fame*, which features **Ted DiBiase Sr.**, a born-again Christian minister.

All indications are that he is positioning himself for a potential job within WWE. Triple-H, in particular, is said to respect his creative mindset and ability to scout and develop talent.

Christian's World heavyweight championship victory at Extreme Rules was met with a respectful—but not exactly roof-raising—response from the fans. His appearance on *Smackdown* two days later, celebrating his big win, didn't evoke a thunderous ovation. And **Randy Orton's** win over Christian for the World title that night seemed to solidify him as a mid-carder with a fluke World title victory.

It seemed that WWE was treating Christian like the new **Tommy Dreamer**.

Then came Over the Limit, where Christian redeemed himself, vindicated his World title reign, and forced the entire industry to take notice. Christian benefited from a hot crowd at the Key Arena in Seattle and an excellent opponent, World champ Randy Orton.

Christian was extraordinarily energized for the bout, rolling up Orton for a quick near-fall within the first 30 seconds. After a surprise spinebuster and standing toe-to-toe with Orton in a slugfest, the "Chris-tian" chants began.

Orton, too, displayed even more snap to his moves, wrenching Christian with a reverse Boston crab, spiking him with a DDT, and even countering Christian's attempt at an Edge-like spear with a thun-

Will Jericho's happy feet take him away from wrestling for good?

Photo by Bob D'Amico/ABC

names makin' news

By Harry Burkett

IN ONE OF the most bizarre and authentic moments in televised wrestling history, **Kharma** interrupted an eight-Diva tag team match on *Raw*, planted herself in the middle of the ring, and cried. But, no, she didn't start pulling her hair out trying to channel **Mankind**. Tears simply rolled down her cheeks. After the break, announcer **Josh Mathews** said that she had experienced some kind of emotional breakdown.

The following week on *Raw*, Kharma went to the ring—still dressed in character—but addressed the crowd in a serious manner. She wasn't Kharma or Awesome Kong at this point. She was Kia Stevens—and she announced that she was pregnant and would be going on maternity leave for a year.

So obviously the sit-down crying session from the previous week was a way for Creative to devise a dramatic exit for her in order to allow her a dramatic re-entry sometime in 2012. But sources suggest that Kharma's emotions that night were so convincing because they were real.

With mysterious vignettes in which she cackled and popped the heads off Barbie dolls, Kharma had become an intriguing personality before she even stormed a WWE ring. Starting with the departing **Michelle McCool** at Extreme Rules, Kharma routinely dismantled one Diva after another without having an official televised match.

Unfortunately for WWE, Kharma's revelation came immediately after she decimated the women's division, making all the Divas appear frightened and weak. In a rarity on WWE television, coming after **Edge** was reprimanded for using the word "wrestling" during his retirement speech, Kharma referred to mopping dojos and wrestling all over the world before making it to WWE. She even referred to her attempt to compete on the second season of *Tough Enough*, mentioning that **Jim Ross**—WWE's former vice president of talent relations—told her that she was too fat for the competition.

"Kharma will never be a standard-issue WWE Diva," responded Jim Ross via Twitter. "She's a wrestler. And a keeper. J.R. shout-outs are always welcome on *Raw* ... I'm a Kharma fan BTW. Does every female wrestler HAVE 2 be a 'Diva'?"

Stevens has received plenty of support since her announcement, including from her former peers in TNA. Tweeted **Matt Morgan**, "Well done tonight. Everything she said tonight was 1000% authentic. Congrats, Kia."

Assuming that everything goes well with the 33-year-old's pregnancy, we'll see whether this sudden break from character curbs her momentum or makes her a strong monster babyface upon her return.

After getting booted from *Dancing With The Stars* on April 26, **Chris Jericho** has been peppered with inquiries about a possible WWE return. In an interview with the U.K. *Sun*, the six-time world champion didn't play coy. He explained it was just a matter of timing—and he took a subtle jab at **The Miz** at the same time.

Kharma's career is taking a pregnant pause

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"I won't come back to wear a suit and use long words and talk slowly," said the 40-year-old star. "Everybody does that now. It would have to be something different to really interest me enough to want to come back ... Right now, I'm busy with other stuff, with the band and things like *Dancing With The Stars*. Going back to wrestling is the last thing on my mind right now. It is a crazy world wrestling for the WWE. You have to be 100 percent mentally and physically into it or you start getting burned out."

Jericho is no doubt keeping himself available for any offers that come his way following his tremendous *DWTS* exposure. But he added

Wrestling fans were saddened to hear of the death of Randy Savage (pictured with Gorgeous George). The "Macho Man" was immensely important to the growth of the industry in the 1980s.

RING OF MONEY

Congratulations to Ring of Honor on its recent sale. Hopefully, this means ROH will have more money available to keep its best wrestlers in the company. I am so tired of my favorite ROH wrestlers jumping to WWE and TNA.

ALEXIS WATTS
Roanoke, VA

THE NAYS HAVE IT

I agree with C.F. Hunter and Frank Krewda who expressed the opinion that WrestleMania 27 did not "bring it" ("Editors' Roundtable" Volume 40, 2011).

I don't know what Frank Ingiosi and Brady Hicks were watching on April 3. How could they have been satisfied with that show? I understand Mr. Ingiosi attended the event. I suspect his adrenaline got the better of him and might have skewed his opinion.

JANICE DILLON
Los Angeles, CA

R.I.P., MACHO MAN

I just can't believe "Macho Man" Randy Savage is gone. For me, Savage was right up there with "The Hulkster" as a childhood wrestling hero. I have so many great wrestling memories of my childhood because of him. Thanks for the memories, Randy, you'll be missed.

MARK VICK
Philadelphia, PA

I was deeply saddened to hear of Randy Savage's death. Of course, the famous "Macho Man" persona from the WWF and Slim Jim commercials will live on forever. But I hope that Savage will now get the credit he deserves for being a first-class wrestler. He wasn't a technical wizard by any means, but his bouts were always fast-paced and intense. Few WWF superstars of that era could match Savage move-for-move. I suppose his outrageous character overshadowed his athleticism, but I'll always remember Savage most for his wrestling.

GENE WORKHAUSER
New York, NY

It's so sad that the "Macho Man" passed away. I'm not sure people realize just how influential Randy Savage was in the wrestling business, but about a week before he died, I mentioned to my friend that when I meet wrestlers and talk to them, I always ask them who their favorite wrestlers were back in the day. Randy Savage's name comes up more often than any other. I think that says tons on what he meant to professional wrestling.

LLOYD CARZENOT
Staten Island, NY □

sincerely yours

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STORMIN' AWAY

It seems that TNA wrestler "Cowboy" James Storm has a large female fan base. Wherever I see female TNA fans, they're all, "James Storm this, James Storm that." I'm playing the *TNA Impact! Video Game* and my 11-year-old cousin says: "Oooh, choose James, choose James!" But, just to annoy her, I chose Chris Sabin and beat James to a pulp! I think he truly was better off as a member of America's Most Wanted.

ASHKAN NIAKI
Leipers Fork, TN

NO EXPLANATION

I wish somebody could explain to me what it is about Christian that prevents him from having a run at the top in WWE.

First, he has a two-day title reign, then he drops a number-one contenders' match to Sheamus on *Smackdown*. Then he shows up as a referee for the title match between Orton and Sheamus! Christian isn't a referee, for crying out loud. I bet he won't even be wrestling on *Smackdown* after a while; he'll be on *WWE Superstars*. I think WWE is missing the boat with this guy. He's capable of so much more.

JEFFREY RUHL
Newark, DE

WELCOME BACK

I was so happy to hear that Chyna is back in the wrestling business. I am not a TNA fan, but I will tune in on Thursday nights just to get a peek at her.

Also, I think it would be great if Chyna got an opportunity to wrestle against some of the TNA men, just like Awesome Kong did. I have no doubts that Chyna could hold her own against the X division men, and even some of the heavyweights.

RANDAL BURCHFIELD
Marietta, GA

A ROYAL DISAPPOINTMENT

I want to call Jerry "The King" Lawler on the carpet for accepting Michael Cole's apology and putting his feud with that worm behind him. Maybe Lawler forgot that Cole insulted his deceased mother, or that Cole enlisted Jack Swagger to break his ankle and his good friend Jim Ross' ankle. Most of all, Cole cost Lawler the opportunity to beat The Miz at *Raw's* King of the Ring show for the WWE heavyweight championship. Lawler should have stayed on Cole's tail for each of those offenses, but instead, he took the easy way out and patched things up with him. I am deeply disappointed in "The King!"

SARAH SAMMER
Holt, AL

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

While TNA fans have certainly been impressed with James Storm's tag team wrestling ability, reader Ashkan Niaki is impressed by what she perceives to be a growing number of female Storm fans.

inside wrestling

THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING

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COVER PHOTO:
Lee South/TNA Wrestling

COVER DESIGN:
Sam Weyant

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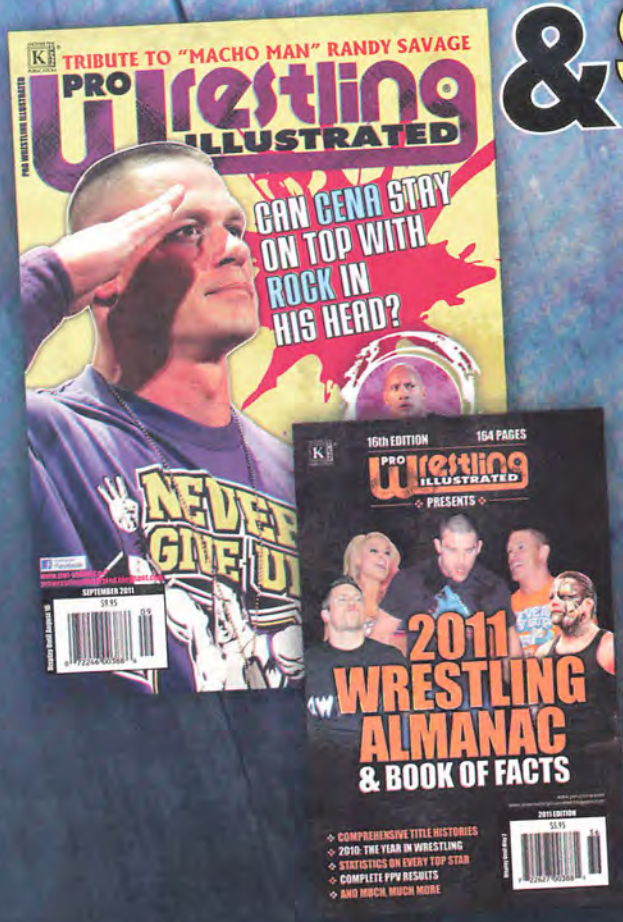

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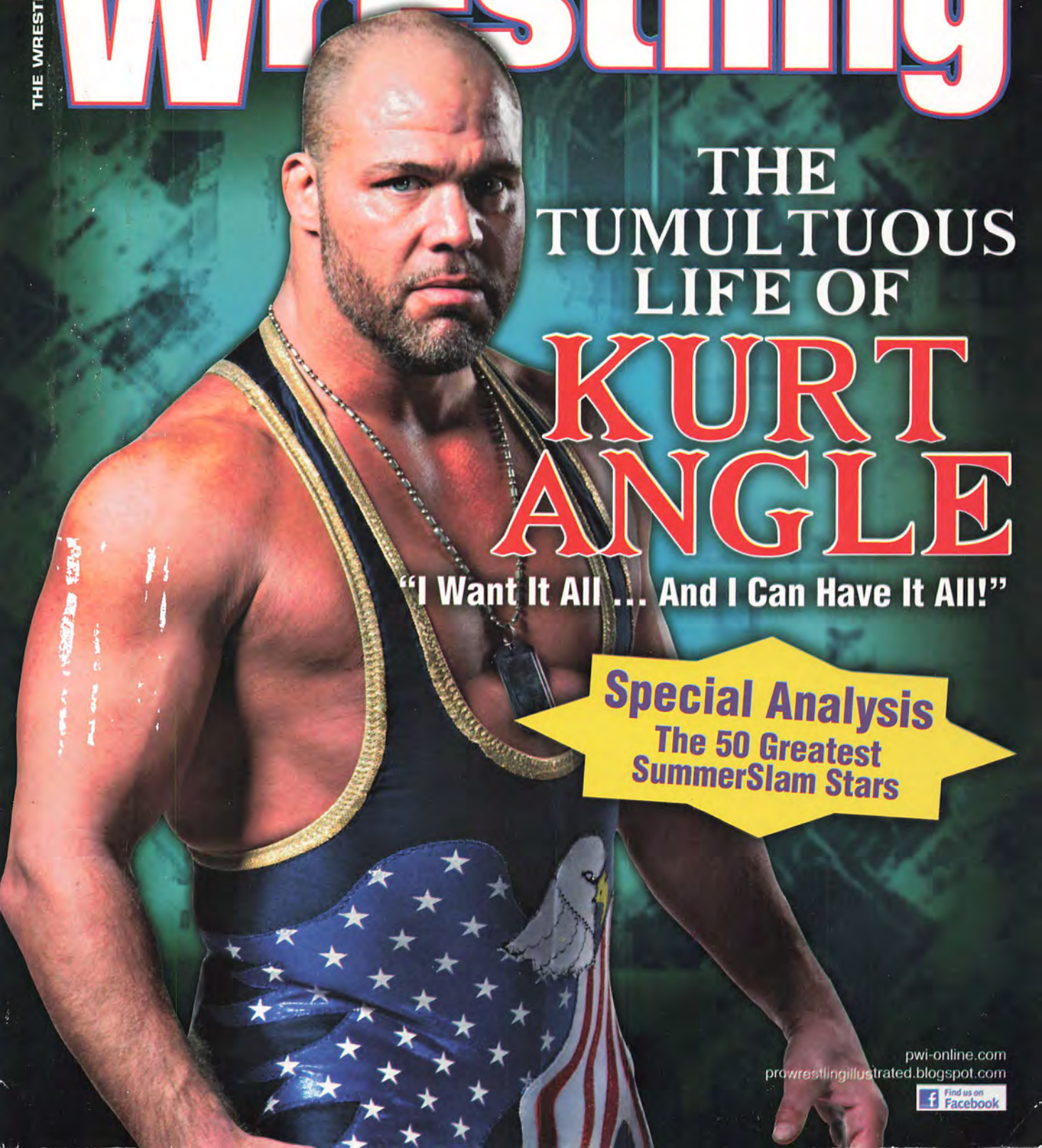

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